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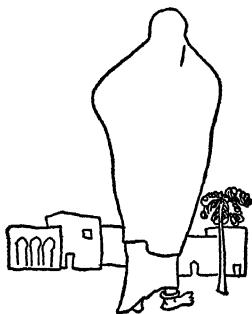


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We Married An Englishman

WE
MARRIED
AN ENGLISHMAN

by
Ruth and Helen Hoffman



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Foreword

TO TELL THE TRUTH, none of us ever really expected that they would marry their Englishman. Not that he was a myth! During the course of the years, a great many of us had actually met him and we really liked him. As a matter of fact, we liked him without any reservations and to like an Englishman without at least half a dozen reservations is not an everyday event in the delightful relations between the so-called English-speaking nations. And so, as long as the rest of us could not very well marry the Twins (we might if they had not stayed up there among the Minnesota Swedes for quite so long a time), we cheerfully gave this courageous candidate our blessing, but to tell you the truth, none of us ever really expected that they would marry their Englishman.

And when they had disappeared into the kitchen to brew us a cup of tea and we were alone and had a chance to get at those damned cats (those thrice-damned, yowling, howling, fighting, screeching, caterwauling cats, which had to be loved in public but could be secretly kicked and pummeled the moment their doting owners were out of sight), then we used to

look at each other and we would nudge each other and we would say, "Did you hear them tell us that they are going next week to join him in Baghdad? Why, ten years from now they will still be here. Those poor girls are so accustomed to be together, they could not live without each other. Next week, indeed!" . . . Enters the tea. . . . "Ah, yes! aren't those darling cats too adorable for anything! Come here, pussy! pussy! pussy! Come here and let me wring your damn neck!"

But one day the impossible happened—the incredible occurred—the unbelievable came to pass. They took a boat, together with twenty-six trunks, bags, valises, canisters, pouches, hand-sacks, knapsacks, artist's easels, baskets full of cats and old towels filled with odds and ends of brushes and paint tubes. A few weeks later a hastily scrawled note, undated and without any other indication about its place of origin than a very smoochy and completely undecipherable Iraqi postmark, informed us that they had safely arrived . . . (where?) . . . that it was very hot . . . that they had met the nicest people on the ship . . . that Ruth had been married and that Girlcat had had kittens (the name alone used to make us shudder, for truly no meaner and nastier Siamese ever drew the breath of life!).

Thereafter, silence, except for occasional missives, usually painted with a soft brush on the backs of a couple of old envelopes, invariably without date or place of origin, informing us that the recently built house and the garden which they had laid out had both of them been swept away by the floods of the Tigris, that a discharged servant had poisoned most of the livestock except Girlcat (Girlcat, of course, would be the one to survive!), and that they had gone to the movies in Baghdad week before last, driving nine hundred miles through a sandstorm to see "The Birth of a Nation" in a theater where the temperature was 180° in the shade.

And then, one day, they came back. They came back exactly as if they had gone around the corner to the grocer's to get some cat food and did not trust us to get it, what with the drugstore on the corner also selling rough-on-rats and other insidious poisons. As soon as they had made themselves comfortable among the twenty-six trunks, bags, valises, canisters, etc. (see above), we went to see them and they told us it had been very nice in Iraq but often rather warm and that Ruth's husband was a swell guy and that the house and the garden had been very lovely but the autumnal rains had a habit of washing all such houses away, which was too bad, and they had known all those handsome young officers who had been murdered in the political putsch the year before and Girlcat . . . why, dear Girlcat, didn't we see her? . . . she was right there on top of the chandelier, spitting at us, the darling!

They soon got absorbed into the normal life of that part of Manhattan which (with Caesarian modesty) we ought to call "our Manhattan" and then we began to hear strange rumors, for they were said to be writing a book. We took about as much stock in that book as we used to do in that Englishman they were going to marry. But the book proved as real as the husband, for not only was it written, but it was a good piece of work too, though where they had ever learned to write, the good Lord alone could tell! As he could probably tell us why he made these beautiful creatures love those hideous cats, why he wasted all this pictorial ability upon two women who can turn an old trunk into a picture by the mere act of sitting down on it, but if he told us, there wouldn't be any fun in it. Then they would be just another pair of twins! Whereas they are now THE TWINS who wrote an Englishman and married a book.

HENDRIK WILLEM VAN LOON

Preface

WE WENT TO IRAQ TO marry an Englishman. At least one of us was to marry him. And one of us did, but with unforeseen difficulties. We are twins, fortunately not the Siamese variety, and have lived all our lives close together. This marriage then, in Iraq, was a tremendous event for us.

Now any guidebook can tell you all about Iraq (or Mesopotamia): how many people, how many square miles, and the price of hotels when there are hotels. These guidebooks will say that Iraq is the scene of the Flood, the Cradle of Civilization, and that its capital city is the famous City of the Caliphs. But only a woman (in our case two women) can tell you what happens when you start *living in The Garden of Eden*. At least Those Who Know say that the Garden of Eden was somewhere in the vicinity of our desert home.

We crossed on an American ship from New York to Beyrout. Beyrout is the port of Syria, the point of embarkation for travelers going across the desert to Baghdad. During the whole sea voyage, the Captain who had seen the world, a Jesuit priest who had explored Mesopotamia, and an Ameri-

can diplomat en route to his post, all took turns (over caviar or wheatcakes) warning us about what was in store for us: Baghdad boils; Arab sheikhs not looking like Rudolph Valentino; the thermometer at 120° in the shade.

No place for a woman, said the Church, the State, and the Ancient Mariner. They asked us if we were very, very Girl Scout and if we knew what "in the blue" meant. We had to admit that our scouting experience had been neglected in favor of painting and going places on the map. When we had the money.

At the first warnings from these charming ship companions, we were scared to death. We wondered if an Englishman were worth it. We saw vivid pictures of ourselves, each with a beautiful Baghdad boil on the tip of her nose, being snatched up and carried off to Bedouin tents by dusty desert sheikhs in a Frigidaireless country.

By the time the twenty-one-day trip had brought us to the end of the Mediterranean, where Beyrout is, we had made up our minds. We would cut off the twin noses, if need be; clean up on the unwashed sheikhs; and import a Frigidaire.

What really happened, and how well we succeeded in the next two years, it is the purpose of this book to tell.

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We Married An Englishman

I

Bus to Baghdad

ON THE MAP THE CITY of Baghdad is only an inch or two from Beyrout.

But when the ship from New York landed us and our two Siamese cats in the Syrian port, we were prepared for what this inch or two meant. There was to be a heart-in-the-mouth drive eastward in a small car through the Libanese Mountains to Damascus; then a twenty-six-hour bus trip across the Syrian and Iraqi deserts to Baghdad, the capital city of Iraq. After Baghdad we still had to make a five or six-hour drive East over permanently waved roads. Then at last we would be at our future home.

But during the first day in Beyrout we learned that the Iraqi entrance regulations required injections for smallpox and typhoid. That meant a delay. The first thing to do was to find a pleasant place to stay. Beyrout was much too hot.

We asked the porter at the St. George Hotel what he thought of the places in the mountains.

"Well," he said, "you could go to Beit Meri, or Brummana, or Bikfaya, Aley, Dhour-el-Choueir, Sofar or Reyfoun."

"Pardon?" we said at these strange-sounding names.

He repeated them all with a few variations, but the word Dhour-el-Choueir caught our attention.

"Dhour-el-Choueir," we rolled out, "we'll go there."

So the next day we took a taxi up the mountain roads to Dhour-el-Choueir where we stayed for a few weeks shaking hands with the Near East.

The hotel in Dhour-el-Choueir was the most élite and elegant of its kind in that district. It was perched up four thousand feet in the mountains and pine forests, with a fine view over the Jebel Sannin. The location was perfect. But the hotel itself was the most astonishing example of the Greek-Soda-Fountain School of Architecture, with details reminiscent of the 1925 French Exposition Style.

All the time we were at this hotel, there was a leak from a pipe in the ceiling near our room. If the waiter or a maid (or even a guest) forgot to empty the pan that stood on the floor to catch the leak, then the pan overflowed, and we had to step across a pool to get to our door. That was the way of things, especially plumbing, in Syria.

However, we had not come all this distance to settle in Syria. When our injections were finished (for which we made periodic trips down to Beyrout) it was time to be on our way to Iraq.

On a happy afternoon we started by car on the first part of the long trip overland to Baghdad.

Beyrout . . . mountains . . . Damascus . . . desert . . . Baghdad. . .

The two Siamese cats, Boycat and Girlcat, the two of us, and a few bags filled the car. The cats walked all over our shoulders, examined the driver in front, and then proceeded to show great surprise at the first hairpin bends which the driver took at a good clip, and often without using his horn.

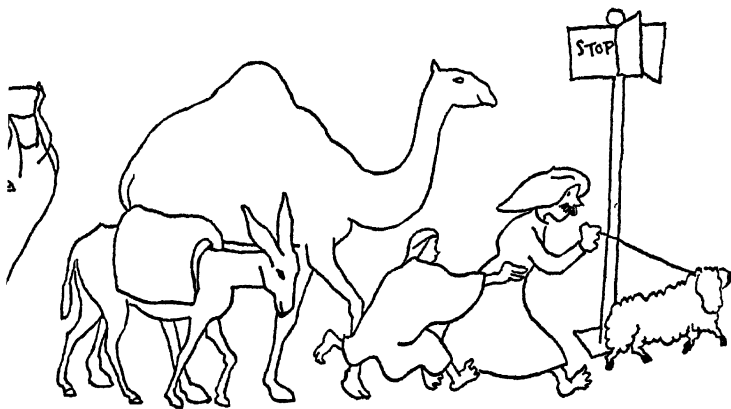
As we drove over roads that twisted up and down the Libanese Mountains, we stopped from time to time along the

way to drink coffee at small garden cafés where we also aired the cats and thanked Allah for the color and extravagant beauty of the views.

It began to grow dark as we neared Damascus and drove along the zigzag river that was hurrying to Damascus too. Scenes flashed by that reminded us of stage sets. There were benches and tables standing under trees, making outdoor cafés or coffee houses, where Syrians and Arabs sat drinking coffee or *arak*, a native liquor. Bright electric lights lit up these places, trying to lure you into the gaiety there. In the leaves of the trees, too, little lights sparkled and made patterns in the night. Some of these cafés were big; others small. But all of them seemed warm with the many people and the lights that protected them from the darkness pressing down from the sky.

The road was crowded with donkeys and camels, horse-drawn carriages, and people of all description.

When we reached the town of Damascus we felt as if we had come out of a theater. The play was still with us and now the reality we faced seemed unreal. But the wonderful baths in the modern hotel made us forget how nice it would



have been had we stopped at the little or big cafés. We turned on all the taps and used as much hot and cold water as we could. White tiles . . . bath mats . . . and a W.C. . . . For us the Orient Palace Hotel had it all over any of the Ritzes.

It was a good thing to take as many baths as possible when we had the chance. Later, in the desert, we were to realize that a tubful of clean, clear water was almost a miracle.

Damascus has the reputation of being the oldest city in the world and its beauty has been likened to a pearl on green velvet. But Mohammed refused to enter it. As he stood gazing at the town from a hill that overlooked it, he explained this strange refusal. He said that since there was for man but *one* Paradise, it should not be sought on earth.

We slept the night at Damascus.

At six o'clock in the morning we put Boycat and Girlcat on their leashes and waited for the bus to Baghdad.

When it arrived we thought for a moment that an old Fifth Avenue bus had got to Damascus by mistake. If it had not been for the hush and church-like whispering peculiar to a bus that is filling up with people going on a long journey, we would have thought that we should get out at Forty-second Street.

We had expected to ride in the elegant *new* bus; we had seen photographs of it all the way from New York to Beyrout. At that time this new tractor bus was the latest creation of the Nairn Transport Company which runs this bus service to Baghdad.

We had learned that it was made in America and that it was supposed to be the last word in comfort on the five-hundred-mile trip. (The distance varies according to the choice of routes by individual drivers.) The bus was dust-proof and had a modern bar to serve cold drinks on hot days. It was first built with a W.C. but later the fixtures were removed

and odds and ends of travel equipment were stored in that space.

But this morning the old bus, not the new one, pulled up to the curb in front of the hotel. Oh, well, thought we, the Nairn Brothers must have heard that there are two cats booked for this run.

We settled ourselves in our allotted seats with Boycat and Girlcat. The other passengers (of various nationalities) gazed with curiosity at the black noses and the crooked tails, and they seemed surprised at such blue eyes. Everyone said, What nice kittens and what kind are they? If you only knew, thought we, how they are going to scream all night and walk over your faces.

It is true that we have never lived down that trip. Everyone that we have met in Iraq since that time has a brother or a cousin or a friend or only a friend of a friend who came to Baghdad on that bus with us and our cats.

Long John, the bus driver, and his second driver (whom he was training and teaching the route) were very gallant. All along the way they made suggestions for the cats' comfort. We were relieved at the border that we did not have to pretend that the cats were a basket of fruit. It seems that everything short of a baby camel can be taken along in the bus if you *have* to get it somewhere.

Soon we had left behind us the last green patch of gardens at the edge of Damascus. The thin minarets and the domes of the city had disappeared, and we followed a cloud of dust that hid even the desert from us. A truck was ahead and we did not lose it until we came to the frontier post of Abu-Shamat, where we left all the desert traffic far behind.

The sky was all one color of blue, pale in the heat of the sun. There was no growing thing. The flat desert sometimes rolled into low hills and slight rises and around these there were tracks made by other cars that had tried different ways.

By lunch time (served shoe-box-fashion) we had been traveling so long over the desert that it did not seem possible that any place on the map could be much further away. China, perhaps. And yet there were about twenty-one more hours ahead of us to Baghdad. If we had been merchants in a camel caravan a couple of decades back, it would have been twenty-one more *days* to go. Then at 120° in the shade, and no shelter of any kind, one would never have written a having-a-wonderful-time-wish-you-were-here-postcard except to an enemy. Only camels did the trip then.

To pass the time we read the folders that were supplied for the information of travelers. One of them went something like this:

EVERY TWO HOURS THIS BUS WILL MAKE A STOP OF TEN MINUTES FOR THE COMFORT OF THE PASSENGERS. GENTLEMEN TO THE RIGHT; LADIES TO THE LEFT.

But it was the usual trouble of no one knowing quickly enough which was right and which was left. The cats got the main idea all right; they had never had such a big sand box.

It grew dark and the headlights made a path ahead of us. The hills were higher, and we felt a gradual change in the landscape. Then far off a handful of lights twinkled a welcome to the Fort of Rutbah Wells.

Finding central heating at the North Pole would have been no greater surprise than finding Rutbah Wells hundreds of miles of desert away from anywhere, ready to offer us ice-cold beer or caviar, or newspapers from London only a few days old. Here at this Fort you could get a night's lodging, send a telegram or a wireless, or fill up with petrol if you were driving your own car across the desert by special permission and had been lucky enough to reach Rutbah.

Inside the four square walls of the Fort, we crossed the

courtyard where two of the wells were located, but we were so tired and thirsty that we did not see them. We had ordered two bottles of Evian water, which had been transported all the way from France, before we saw that there was excellent cold water to be had from the wells only a few yards away. In the women's washrooms we had a refreshing shower consisting of a jug of water thrown over us by an obliging Assyrian girl. She told us that the men's room had a real shower.

Then we dined on the electrically fanned and lighted terrace while the cats roamed around the bombproof inner dining room, which the management had turned over to them since there were dogs in the court. The dinner we ate had been brought by plane or car or boat from the Mediterranean coast and Baghdad and Persia and England and certainly America, for we had Heinz tomato sauce on the table.

As we sat resting from the intense heat of such a long day, we learned something about Rutbah.

The Fort was built by the Iraqi Government in 1926. Its location, halfway in running time between Damascus and Baghdad, made it so convenient for travelers that it became necessary to enlarge it the following year. The Nairn Transport Company rent part of the building for use as a resthouse for travelers.

The first time that a car crossed the desert between Damascus and Baghdad was in 1923. Until then no one had any idea that it was possible to make the journey by car, though the British Air Force had sent out a survey party in 1921 over the route from Ramadi to Transjordan, along which they later plowed a furrow as an air guide. Several Syrians drove the first car across. They realized that there was money to be made on the exchange by transferring gold from Damascus to Baghdad. They profited well by their courage and repeated the surprising performance.

During the next six months the two Nairn Brothers estab-

lished a weekly overland service for passengers and mail. At first a convoy of small American cars made the journey. But raiding tribes attacked these cars as they had been attacking camel caravans for hundreds of years. Casualties were not uncommon, though yearly payments were made to induce the marauding tribes not to attack. The wife of a French Consul was shot and killed on this route. But the time saved traveling by car was a temptation and passengers overlooked the risk. Before this, the journey from the Mediterranean to Baghdad required about twenty-eight days by way of the Persian Gulf and about twenty days by camel over the desert route; the mail took eleven days by a special fast camel service. Buses later replaced the first small Nairn cars, and rival companies were formed locally. Now many thousands of people cross the desert every year.

At Rutbah the sight of the changing of the guard was a spectacle long to be remembered. These soldiers are Arab tribesmen who police the Fort and guard it from attack. The words "changing the guard" usually call to mind a vision of smart dignity, uniforms, and stately horses. At Rutbah the dignity was there, but all mixed up with the long hair and the untidy skirts of the tribesmen. And there was a kind of rough ceremony, but somehow the pomp had got lost in the shuffle. (We wondered if Laurel and Hardy had been left on the desert by mistake and were still rehearsing a scene, while slowly going fuzzy in the heat.)

When the passengers had been fed and the bus had been serviced, the business of the Fort was over for the night. As the gates closed behind us, a quiet peace settled down on its high walls and the rows of mud houses beyond.

Soon we were beyond the security of Rutbah, and its lights were lost among the hills. In the bus, those who talked spoke in loud whispers, and lights were turned out so that the driver could see ahead into the night.

After a while the hills flattened themselves out, and more and more stars dotted the sky. They were cold and too far away to be friendly. Toward midnight we saw the lights of a car, zigzagging in the distance. They turned and came toward us. Were we going to be robbed? In our loneliness we had forgotten that there might be other travelers in the desert besides ourselves. The lights turned out to be those of a truck which had lost its direction and had been experimenting on various tracks. Long John pointed out the route to the other driver, and we were again swallowed up in the lonely wastes of the desert.

There was little sleep for us. Boycat and Girlcat were restless and the night dragged out into an unfriendly dawn.

At last we were nearing the Euphrates. When we reached Ramadi there were patches of green growing in the dust. At this Iraqi frontier and customs post we ate our breakfast. There was a tiny resthouse whose breakfast room was a scraggly lawn in front. The coffee we will never forget, hard as we may try. It put all four of us to sleep (Girlcat, Boycat and us). We slept for the last three hours of the journey into Baghdad; and we went right on sleeping peacefully, slumped in our seats in the bus, long after we stopped in the terminal in Baghdad.

We were awakened by the gentle poking of the Englishman who came into the bus to search for us.

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II

Baghdad

WHETHER THE DAY WE arrived in Baghdad was a Mohammedan Sunday on Friday, or a Jewish Sunday on Saturday, or a Christian Sunday on Sunday, we were not quite sure. But something was definitely wrong.

The first thing to do on our arrival was to look after all our baggage, all thirty-four pieces. (We still insisted that there were only thirty-one, since three of them were *baskets*.)

Douglas, the Englishman, did not like a lot of luggage.

We had known this for a long time, ever since we had first known him. So, a few weeks before, when we had seen our luggage spread out in the customs house in Beyrout, we had decided to do something about it. The amount and variety of our luggage was a shock even to us. Ours was not the well-organized equipment of the careful traveler who paints red stripes on each piece of baggage for identification. Spread before us was a collection of trunks, cases, wooden crates, handbags, and baskets. And unmistakably, in an arched wooden case, sat an old portable sewing machine. Nearby were a couple of old paint boxes and two comparatively new type-

writers. The cats' baskets we carried ourselves. We resolved then and there to throw *something* away.

Instead we went out and bought another trunk, into which we emptied the contents of four small bags and innumerable baskets. We discarded the empty luggage, bought a few more things to fill up the new trunk, and congratulated ourselves.

After that our luggage looked more respectable.

When we were ready to leave Beyrout on this desert trip to Baghdad, we informed the bus company that only five bags were to go with us in the bus. The rest, totaling twenty-nine pieces, was to be sent on later by freight bus. We were not, we explained, in a hurry for those twenty-nine pieces.

The five lone bags which we would have with us on the trip would make a good impression on Douglas, and we needed to make a good impression, since Boycat and Girlcat were to be a surprise.

The bus company said that they would do their best to send the twenty-nine pieces by freight bus to Baghdad within a week or two. We generously suggested that they should not put themselves out. We were not exacting people; we would put up with a little delay without complaining. We understood these things.

Since we had often met with delays in shipping baggage here and there, certainly in this case we could count on some unexpected delay across such a desert route. The twenty-nine pieces of baggage would undoubtedly arrive in Baghdad only after we had had plenty of time with Douglas to pave the way for them. It would be bad news gently distributed to him over a period of time.

It was a weight off our minds; we had handled the problem well, we thought.

But unfortunately, on our arrival in Baghdad, we found that the bus company had handled their part of the problem just a little *too* well. They had shown great efficiency.

When we stepped off the bus with Douglas, we looked around for our five small bags. Long John came over to us. He seemed rather proud of himself. He indicated our five bags lined up on the pavement.

"But," he announced, "we have done something very special for you, something we would not have done for anyone else."

"Yes? That's very nice of you—"

"Look!" Long John exclaimed as he pointed up to the top of the bus.

There, lashed to the roof was a great pile of bags and boxes and trunks and baskets. The sewing machine was very obvious from where we stood.

"As we weren't crowded we brought *all* your luggage on this trip." He indicated the lot with a great sweeping gesture. "All that is yours!"

We looked at Douglas. He seemed wilted, but true to his British tradition he said nothing.

But as we turned away we heard him muttering to himself, "Sewing machine . . ."

It was a bad start for the first day of our Pioneering Project.

By the time the baggage was attended to and arranged for, the morning was gone.

The American and British consulates were closed for the afternoon so we could not start the business of the marriage bans. We did not know then that this was the beginning of a long and complicated attempt just to get married.

We spent the rest of the day eagerly looking around Baghdad. We would never have recognized it from Douglas Fairbanks' "The Thief of Baghdad" in which he leaped about so gracefully in those Hollywood settings.

It is true that there are still blue-tiled domes and lovely minarets and palm groves, placid and shady. But one does not



see these things grouped together for a photograph. Besides a moving picture does not reproduce smells.

There was very little to be seen of the Baghdad of Harun-al-Rashid's time. The old walls of the city may, however, still be traced. Here and there an ancient arch, a leaning minaret, tired with the centuries, still stands in hidden places or boldly in the open, where Fords and camels pass side by side and ragged beggars from the Arabian Nights limp along beside young Iraqis who are hurrying to the cinema in European clothes.

But the glory has departed from Al Rashid Street which even in Baghdad is popularly called Main Street. It was arbitrarily cut right through the town by the Turks. The result is an odd assortment of backs and sides and fronts of houses showing behind rows of odd shops and coffeehouses that look as if they had been built on the spur of the moment for temporary use. Here and there France, in her worst architectural moment, has descended on Main Street, replacing the ancient splendors with a shop front or a modern cinema that is even

more dazzling to the Arab than the sun-struck gold dome of the famous Kadhimein Mosque.

Since that first visit to Baghdad, a new Mayor of the city has widened the street and torn down some of the buildings to make room for broader sidewalks and more permanent buildings. He has made a study of European architecture and his ambition is to improve the town.

Traffic on Al Rashid Street was so crowded from five in the afternoon until dusk that we hardly felt safe. Horse-drawn carriages with clanging bells for klaxons, shabby buses, old Rolls-Royces, and assorted small cars, with Arabs standing on the running boards, were all stopped at intervals to give the cross traffic of camels, donkeys and sheep a chance. Men crowded us on the sidewalks and we bumped into black-veiled women. We walked with Bedouins, Arabs, Baghdadi, and occasionally a Britisher. The traffic honked and clanged and clattered away, while gramophones and radios wailed Arabic songs in the cafés. Altogether, Baghdad was a most contradictory city.

•

III

Paradise Postponed

THE PLAN WAS TO leave Baghdad very early the following morning. We were warned that unless we left early we would suffer. Here in the summer one travels only in the first hours of the morning or the late afternoon on account of the terrific heat of the sun. Iraq is privileged to be one of the hottest spots in the world.

A steady five-hour drive in a touring car would bring us to the place we had been so long getting to. It was to be the last lap of our journey and our last day of traveling for a long time. Douglas had said, "At last you are here. We have years ahead of us. We need never say good-by again."

We asked questions about the house we were to live in. How was it built? How many stories high was it? What color was it painted? We found out that it was one story high, that it was built of burned brick, and that it was not painted at all. We wondered if the pictures Douglas gave us in words were anything like what the house would be.

In any case we were prepared for the worst. We had been warned about living quarters in Iraq on the ship coming from New York. Pioneers in America did not even have a roof over

their heads when they pioneered. They had to build log cabins while they waited. At least we would have shelter.

Douglas suggested that when we arrived at our future home we should look the place over carefully and make a list of all the necessities. Then we could come back to Baghdad to make these purchases. We were told that, since the rooms were furnished in the simplest way, we could start from the beginning. But there was no department store around the corner from the house. We would be obliged to go almost two hundred miles to buy a mop.

Douglas was relieved to turn over to us all the future responsibilities of the household. For him the problem was solved; for us it was just beginning. Since the winter he had lived in a small one-room house made of mud. It had none of the conveniences of home. Nothing had been important except his work and getting it done. Now in preparation of our coming he had succeeded in building a house with enough rooms in which to eat and sleep. The rest of the job was up to us.

Ahead of us lay a neglected Garden of Eden and we were to put our house in order.

That night we all slept on the roof of the hotel.

At bedtime in Iraq there is a general exodus of the population to the roofs. It is much too hot to sleep indoors in the summer. As far as privacy was concerned the arrangement reminded us of the American Pullman car. The beds were placed in rows and groups. Since there was a slight breeze from the Tigris, we were glad that our group of beds faced the river. Mosquito nets smelling of dust acted as a protection not only against sand flies and mosquitoes, but also against the breeze that would have been a little refreshing.

Beside each bed was a Flit gun and a thin-necked water jar of porous clay. We found that during the night it was neces-



sary to do a lot of Flitting and drinking. The temperature of the water in the native jugs was almost as cool as iced water in a thermos.

The first part of the night we did not sleep well. The heat was like a heavy blanket that pressed down and smothered us. It seemed only a few minutes after we finally got to sleep that we were awakened by a tap on the shoulder. It was barely getting light. We wondered what was the matter. Anything might happen in a country like this, we thought.

We felt a vibration. Perhaps it was an earthquake.

"Four o'clock, Memsahib," said the shoulder tapper.

As he walked away to call others who were sleeping, we felt the vibration again. It was caused by the boy walking over the mud roof.

We remembered that we were to start early today. We found that at this time of year the sun rose about four-thirty. Later, we became resigned to the fact that it grew so hot in

an hour that it was impossible to sleep longer. The sun concentrated with a vicious determination on the stomach and the head.

In those early hours of the morning the noises of Baghdad began. There were animal sounds and shouts of the mule drivers. There were sharp sounds of horses' hoofs and the clanging of bells up and down Al Rashid Street. The early hours were the best part of the day and everyone made use of them.

Downstairs in the hotel the beds in the bedrooms were made up in case anyone wanted to go back to bed, but the heat and close air in the rooms were discouraging. A cold bath seemed more in order.

We had breakfast on a wide grass terrace facing the Tigris. It was very pleasant there and we watched life on the river start for the day. Herds of water buffalo swam down with the current to a spot where their day's work of giving milk began. Following upon the water buffalo, a group of young men and boys were getting their exercise for the day and perfecting their strokes. Near the shore men took off their clothes and used the river as a convenient washbowl.

We forgot that it was getting late. It was seven o'clock.

"If you do not hurry we will have to wait until tomorrow to travel," Douglas warned us.

We remembered all the warnings we had had about the heat and the danger of traveling in the middle of the day. We were not accustomed to the sun. But we had always liked it; we had never had enough of it. There must be something wrong with these people, we thought, who cannot stand a bit of sun. We did not even equip ourselves with sun helmets. We wore berets and thin cotton dresses.

It was eight o'clock by the time we had all our miscellaneous bags, typewriters, cat baskets, sawdustpans, ourselves, and our two cats stowed away in the back seat.

Just as we were ready to start a young Iraqi lawyer, who lived in the hotel and who was friendly with the proprietor, sauntered along to the car with an air of inspection to see that the porters did their work properly. They had already packed everything in the car twice. The first time they had done it their way, and the second time they had done it according to our directions. Their method was to place all the heavy luggage on the top of a fragile hatbag that was ready to collapse anyway.

The young lawyer had timed himself perfectly. He arrived after all the work was done and we felt well-packed and fitted in. He took one look at the car, exclaimed something in Arabic, and then proceeded to make a great show of watching out for our interests. He began to shout directions about the luggage to the porters. We had visions of the whole car being entirely unpacked again. But all these directions that were given with such an air of authority merely told the porters to make two very minor changes. One typewriter changed places with another.

Then the young lawyer continued to stand beside the car while Douglas went back into the hotel to answer a telephone call.

"You are going to Kut today?" he asked.

"Yes, we are going through Kut."

Kut-el-Amarrah was on our route. It was about a three-hour run from Baghdad and more than halfway to our destination.

"But surely you are going to stop at Kut for the night?"

"No, we are going all the way to Ali Gharbi." Ali el Gharbi was the town nearest to our house. (We had already shortened its name to suit ourselves.)

"But it is too late to start. Why don't you wait until tomorrow?"

"But we are going *today*," we insisted.

"Madam, you are going to drive in the *heat of the day*?"

"Yes, we like the sun."

He was aghast at this remark and we saw that he thought we were mad.

The cats started right out to show their disapproval of more traveling. Douglas seemed in good spirits to be on the way at last. He suggested several things that might be the matter with Boycat and Girlcat. Had they had enough to eat for breakfast? Perhaps they were thirsty? Were we sure that their collars were not too tight?

He offered to make changes for their comfort. He was very sorry for them. They screamed at him. Since we had crossed on a long desert journey with them, it took us longer to get nervous over their crying than it did Douglas. He became very silent as the time went on. We felt disapproval in the air but there was no word or sign to indicate it. His admirable restraint was our first real lesson in English self-control.

In any case, conversation would not have been easy, since Douglas was driving the car and his driver was with him in the front seat.

Very soon we came to the River Dialah. When we stopped to pay a toll of twenty-four *fihs* (twelve cents) the cats screamed their loudest. Children of the village rushed up to see what had happened. Several dogs came leaping to the car. They were furious at the new smell that waked them out of their sound sleep on the road in front of the car. These native dogs usually lay in the middle of the road and never moved for passing traffic. Two boys took sticks to the dogs to keep them from getting too close to us. The cats spit at the dogs and got very excited. Girlcat jumped over the side of the car. All the dogs scattered. Fortunately for them she was on a lead.

In the confusion we hardly noticed one of the boys who seemed to have something to do with collecting the toll.

"*Shinû hadha?*" (What is this?) he asked, pointing to Boycat and Girlcat.

We did not understand what he meant and did not answer.

"*El bâzazîn!*" (Cats), someone shouted in the crowd.

Weeks later on a trip up to Baghdad we were surprised to hear a sudden shout when we passed through this village. It sounded like a shout of recognition in any language. It came from the same boy who had been so curious about the cats.

"*Wen el bâzazîn?*" (Where are the cats?), he shouted from the roadside.

We were very pleased that Boycat and Girlcat had made such an impression.

We drove out of the village into the country. The flat desert land was broken up with canal ditches and drainage pits. Patches of dust made blurs on the horizon. There was dust wherever there was movement; in spots the roads were made of settled dust. The whole countryside was the color of dirt. Against this sameness vivid colors moved slowly across the desert and up and down the road: there were camels with strings of blue beads around their necks; frightened Arab horses ridden by dark-bearded sheikhs who looked as if they had just rented their costumes for a masquerade; great packs of brushwood carried on the backs of women who wore any color next to any other color. Dirt and wear had softened these colors so that they fitted together with the smoothness of a great masterpiece. Further on there was a flock of sheep. The dirty white and auburn sheep stood out against the brown and black ones; three children, who watched the flock, added to the picture the deep blue of their rags and the dull green of a coat. A magenta-pink scarf hung from the neck of one of them.

Driven by women, a group of donkeys passed us. They

were loaded with household stuff. One donkey had two pure white chickens riding on his back. In a country where it is rare to see anything really white, the accent of these two spots was startling against the drab background on the one hand and the bright clothes of the women on the other.

We overtook a herd of grazing camels. When they saw the car some of them started to run across the road. One young camel ran straight ahead of the car while we wondered which way he was going to turn. He wondered too. He turned to the left and then to the right. By that time we were almost on top of him, which meant a quick stop, and all the dust that should have been left far behind enveloped us so that we could not see at all. The camel himself was completely blotted out of the picture. By the time the dust had subsided, the camel was already eating camel thorn in a new patch that he would never have found except for us.

When we arrived at Aziziyah we were impressed with the many green trees (covered with dust). A garden ran through the middle of the village between two one-way traffic streets. This town was almost the half-way mark between Baghdad and Kut.

We reached it in about an hour and a half.

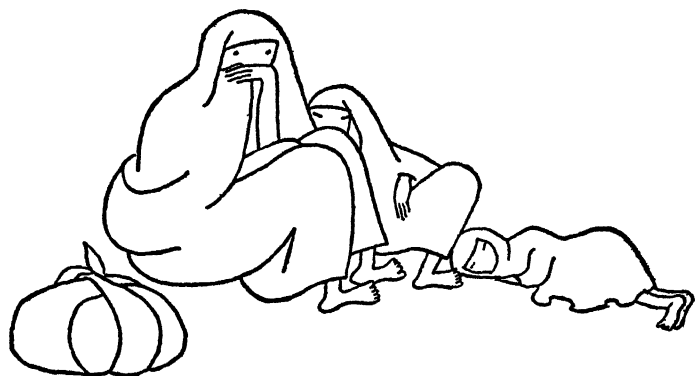
By this time the heat was almost unbearable. The sun was like a furnace. The perspiration ran down our faces and made little channels as it flowed over the dust and dirt.

Suddenly far ahead of us we saw a dark spot on the desert. Then three smaller dots beside it. They were figures by the side of the road.

As we drew near we saw that the tall figure was an Arab who was watching our approach. Three other persons were sitting on the ground beside him.

The Arab waved at us.

"Do you think there has been an accident?" we asked Douglas, as we came closer to them.



The Arab motioned for a lift. Our driver shouted something to him in Arabic in not too amiable a tone.

The Arab laughed and answered in a casual and friendly way as if he were wishing us bon voyage.

As we passed we saw beside him in the shade of the telegraph pole a woman and two small children. As a protection from the heat and sun, they were all bundled up in black *abbas* (cloaks) as if it were winter. Beside them lay bundles containing, we supposed, household stuff. These were done up in the coarse native cloth. The two children were sound asleep on the bare ground.

The woman looked completely contented and quite happy. Moreover she looked as if she would be content to sit there for several more days if necessary.

When we asked what it was all about we were told that they were waiting for a bus!

A bus might be along any time now in a day or two.

When the foothills of Persia appeared in the distance, they were a welcome change in the landscape. We were told that it was not far now to Kut and we were glad of that because it seemed imperative that we stop for a short rest at least. But by the time we came within sight of the town, we were

so tired out that we could not face the idea of getting out of the car.

"Would you like to stop in Kut for anything?" Douglas asked.

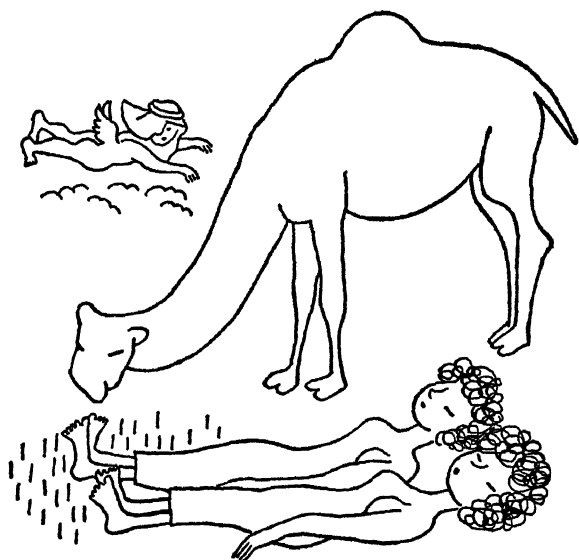
Yes, we thought, we would like to stop in Kut and *never* go any further. But we answered in weak voices disguised to sound like the voices of a couple of Amazons. "No, certainly not. Please go on. It is much better to go on."

We skipped the town entirely, since there was a road that skirted the village. Here at Kut, in 1916, the British and Indian troops held out under Generals Townshend and Nixon for a hundred and forty-three days against the Turks who surrounded them. Those were tragic months. Thousands of lives were lost through starvation and disease; lack of medical supplies and hospital facilities added to the toll. The expected reinforcements did not arrive, and Kut surrendered at last.

It was not long after leaving Kut that ahead of us on the road we saw water. We were relieved at the mere thought of a lake close by. There were trees too, and animals grazing. But Douglas had never mentioned a lake of this sort to us. When we found that this lake disappeared as we got close to it, and others took its place in the distance, we realized that they were mirages.

Except for these mirages everything was the color of dried mud, no matter where we looked . . . miles from anywhere there was an Arab walking on the road going somewhere . . . God knows where . . . more camels . . . and indescribable heat that pressed down and leaped up at you.

Nothing seemed to matter when finally Douglas pointed out the town of Ali Gharbi on the opposite side of the river. Then far off in the distance we saw a group of low buildings, the same mud color. Five minutes more and we turned off the main road into the little drive that led to our house.



By this time we were desperate with exhaustion and quite ready to die. But Paradise was postponed.

As we drove up to the gate the house loomed ahead of us very white and glaring. It was dripping paint. Standing at varying degrees of attention were several long-skirted ragged figures. They opened the gates with a flourish and a sort of salute. One carried a shovel and another wore knives in his belt.

Douglas spoke up apologetically, "Don't expect too much . . . there's a lot to be done around here. I hope you'll not be too disappointed."

We saw before us several low buildings spread irregularly over the grounds, a few straggling fences, and a bit of gray wash hanging out on a line.

It looked as good as a first-rate palace right out of the Arabian Nights.

IV

People Who Live in Mud Houses

PUT YOUR FINGER ON
the most unlikely place on the map.

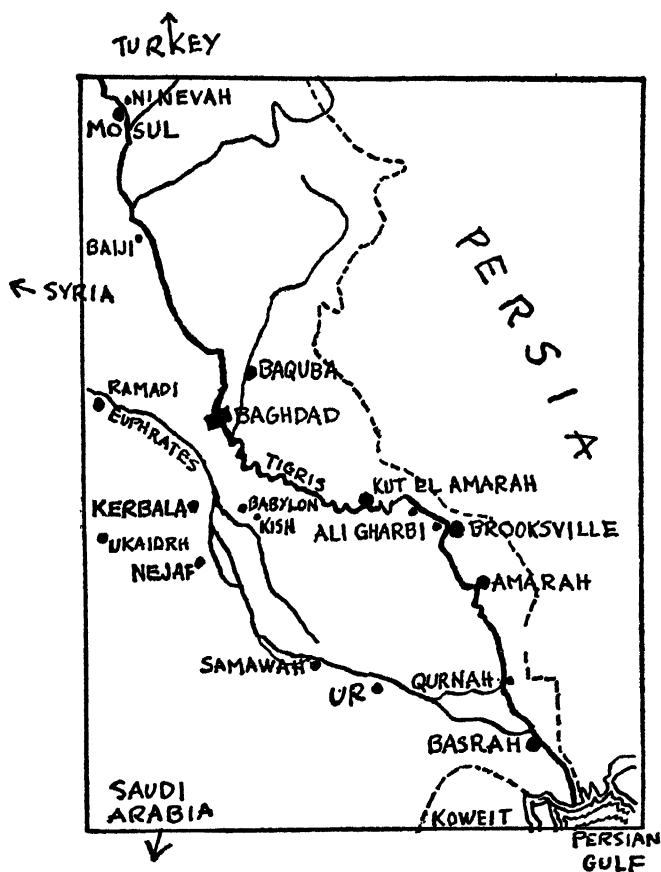
That was where we were, halfway between Baghdad and Basrah. The Persian Mountains were behind us and the River Tigris ran through our front yard.

That first day when we arrived, the young Frenchman Henri, who was Douglas's assistant, helped us out of the car and showed us to our room.

It was a large room built of mud and there was a bath attached. Henri pointed with pride to the shower out of which, when he showed us the combination of taps, came scalding water instead of the icy spray we anticipated. The sun heated the pipes in the summer, but in winter, we were to find, the water came out freezing cold and made quite an event of the early morning shower.

They would wait for us in the salon, Henri said, and then we would have a spot of lunch.

It took us an hour to clean up and hurriedly change the furniture around, so that the tables were flat against the wall instead of at an angle. Only God and a woman who is both-



ered by a chair in the wrong place know where the strength came from to move that furniture. It had taken only a small challenge such as a misplaced table to bring us back to life and start us off on our Pioneering Project.

In the meantime Boycat and Girlcat revived quickly. They, too, were interested in their new home. They smelled everything in the room and they examined every corner. When

they were finished with the inspection they promptly curled up on the cool cement floor and fell asleep.

In the salon, glasses of lukewarm lemon squash helped to revive us. Problem number one: no ice.

Then we lunched in a small, darkened room where there was complete relief from the painful brightness of the day outside. The lunch was served by an Indian who turned out to be the Cook. His khaki jacket smothered a multitude of smells but his pleasant face and his speed in serving made up for a great deal.

He shot great sprays of Flit out of a Flit gun which he aimed directly at the bread. Douglas told us that we would soon learn to prefer Flit to flies, sand flies, and mosquitoes. (He did not mention scorpions and cockroaches.) Once the Flit habit comes into your life you will never be able to overcome it.

Henri, we found, was one of those charming Frenchmen who brings France with him wherever he goes; and if you forget it, a beautiful rolling "r" will put you right back on the sidewalk, drinking *café au lait*.

This young man had had misgivings about our first impression of the house as we drove up to it. So he had spent the entire day before we arrived in designing a gate for the entrance to our grounds, a gate painted glaring white as if for a suburban villa in France. If you have ever driven around Fontainebleau or Barbizon you have seen many times the model for this gate. Henri had had the local Arab carpenter build it. He had painted it at the last moment and there it stood completed only a half-hour before we arrived.

It was Henri, too, who had taken the trouble to arrange flowers in low copper bowls which we found here and there in the house. So we had, that first day, a glimpse of what a zinnia might do in the future lives of all four of us in our isolation.

In the late afternoon we ventured out of the house.

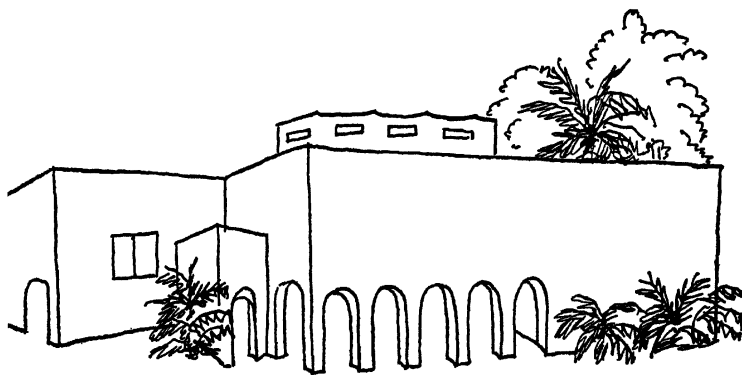
It was cooler now and we were at leisure to find out for ourselves what sort of a place we were to live in.

Near the road we stood looking at the Persian Mountains. They were blue now with the coming evening, and though they were eighteen miles away, they seemed very close. Then we walked to the river which was only about fifty yards from the house. We stood on the high bank and looked down at the Tigris, dark red now in color. It seemed more friendly at this cooler hour.

Above us camels and donkeys were going to the water to drink. Arab women and children were filling their waterskins for their night supply. We felt the pleasure of water near us. It was very different from seeing the Tigris on the map.

And now for the first time we had a full view of our house from the front. From where we stood it seemed as if it might have just risen out of the ground. It was a part of the earth on which it was built, for it lay close to the ground, low with its one story. Arches formed a roofed terrace running across the whole front of the house. Its style was native but adapted to our needs.

For the most part the house was built of burned brick, but



the terraces and the arches and our room were built with sun-dried mud brick. If mud bricks were good enough for the Sumerians, we decided, they were good enough for us.

We knew that in Mesopotamia, from the fourth millennium onward, sun-dried mud brick has been used for building. Where excavations have taken place we later saw the remains of this type of brick, baked in the sun thousands of years ago. In most cases exposure to the rains and the floods have caused the bricks to return to their original mud. But in protected places they have lasted as well as if they had been baked in a kiln.

Not far from Baghdad in the very old ruins of Kish, dating from early Sumerian times, there still exist amongst other ruins the remains of a great palace that looks out over a lonely desert, a palace with stairways and courtyard and pillars. The bricks of which it was built are cake-shaped mud bricks, called *plano-convex*. They were used by the Sumerians as far back as the earliest recorded dynasty.

Near Kish in the newer ruins of Babylon you may walk over paved brick streets lined with the high walls of ruined buildings. There at Babylon the remains of vaulting are thought to mark the sight of the hanging gardens. And Daniel and the Lions' Den becomes a real story as you look down at these heaps of ruins with Nebuchadnezzar's name on most of the bricks.

It was curious to think that only a few hours away, toward the northwest in Dhibban, Douglas and his Scotch partner were making bricks in a plant that they had designed and built to produce bricks in the most modern method known. The machinery would have astonished Nebuchadnezzar. And the bricks, instead of building temples and palaces, were building the enormous new British Air Force Base at Dhibban.

During the next few months we found out how to make

mud bricks. The method is the same as it was in ancient times. A pit is dug and in the pit the earth and water are mixed and worked until the mud is the right consistency. Straw is added, too. Then the mud is put in a mold and laid out on the ground in neat rows to dry for days in the sun and wind.

Rain will melt and ruin bricks in the drying stage. We were to have a few tragedies ourselves with melted building material. In laying the bricks, wet mud and straw are used as a cement, and a plaster of mud is used on the walls. The technique is the same as filling and frosting a cake. Sometimes *juss* (a finer native plaster) is spread over the mud to give a better finish.

In a newly built house the dampness of fresh bricks keeps the rooms cool for many days.

The common building material in Iraq is mud. After the war, the British built houses for Government officials with sun-dried mud bricks. These houses were built to last about twelve years. But those that were kept in good repair are still in excellent condition. It is hardly to be hoped, however, that they will last as long as the Sumerian houses.

Today in Baghdad and towns in the southern part of Iraq, burned brick is considered more desirable. If an Iraqi lives in a house of burned brick he is respected.

It is a little sad that the Baghdad Iraqi has adopted a style for his house that is not only warped in its modernity, but fancy as well. (He says it is European.)

Our house was square in shape and it was built around a middle room that was higher than the rest of the house. This room was about twenty feet high and octagonal in design. There was a series of eight tiny windows near the ceiling. It was rather a pleasant room in spite of a sort of medieval atmosphere that it had. The burned brick with which it was

built was not plastered, so that the natural color of the brick gave a warmth that was needed. The two fireplaces were the only decoration.

Two small sets of rooms opened off to the left and the right of the salon. They were for Douglas and Henri. Each had a bedroom, a dressing room and a bath, and these, too, were left in the raw brick.

The kitchen and several pantries, one of which we used for a dining room, occupied the third side of the house. Across the front facing the river, the covered terrace protected the building from the glare of the sun in the summer and from the cold in the winter. Our room and bath had just been completed. It had been added in the form of a wing.

Though the house was rather crudely built it was well arranged for the peculiar climate of Iraq.

Only a few days passed before we began to make plans.

We would start the rest of the building as soon as possible. It would be a good idea to build a dining room first. Eating was to be all the recreation we were going to have, and we must have a fitting place to do it in.

We would have a view since there was such a marvelous one of the Tigris and the mountains. We would make full use of it.

Would it take long, we asked, to build?

No one could give us a satisfactory answer.

Someone said that a dining room would take only a few days to build. Someone else said that it would be finished by spring.

We were going to tackle a job that was new to us. We made plans at night when we went to bed. We had never played with blocks when young. It would take courage to build even a mud hut without knowing a word of Arabic. It was not to be hoped that we could carry on without a hitch,

but we were under the impression that we could do the job with typical American speed.

We did not know then that there was such a word as *bacher* in the Arabic language, and that *bacher* has the same significance as *mañana*.



V

Cradle of Civilization

THERE WERE NO OTHER Europeans for nearly a hundred miles around. And those who lived that far away were scarce and scattered.

Our own colony consisted of our household of four, and in addition, an Italian electrical engineer and an English foreman. These two men who worked for Douglas lived in a small mud house a few hundred yards away where Douglas's Gravel Plant was located on the Tigris.

We hardly ever saw them.

We were to live what other people considered Lonely Lives. Though there were to be occasional trips to Baghdad or Basrah or other towns, there would be long stretches in between these trips. Even the nearest Arab village of Ali Gharbi was almost five miles away, and that was only a very small village. Besides that, it was on the other side of the river and on stormy days in the wintertime it was impossible to get to, even if for some purpose we had wanted to go to Ali Gharbi. The Gravel Plant was our reason for living here.

At first the Gravel Problem was a complete mystery to us,

but during the coming months we were able to find out much about it.

A year before there was absolutely nothing on the present site. Then Douglas designed and constructed his Plant which was to work day and night in order to produce a half million tons of aggregate (sand and gravel) for the construction of the Kut Barrage (or dam) at Kut-el-Amarrah on the Tigris. He had contracted to finish the gravel job in three years' time, which meant capacity production under his small staff of Europeans, who were to be increased as time went on, and Indians. The work required anywhere from one hundred to four hundred laborers, depending on the season.

In choosing a site Douglas had been obliged to explore in various parts of Iraq in order to discover a gravel deposit whose location was not too difficult in regard to transportation facilities. Transportation facilities, in a country as undeveloped as this, are to say the least very primitive. It was necessary to have access to the river.

After he had chosen the site it meant that he had to construct a railway line and two plants. He ordered the locomotives and wagons and all the machinery in England. They were shipped from there by way of the Suez Canal and the Red Sea, around the Arabian Peninsula and up the Persian Gulf to Basrah. From Basrah they were sent up the Tigris to our Port which had been built to receive them.

Then came the job of seeing that the so-called skilled laborers were taught their professions. All claimed years of experience behind them. (The very few who knew their jobs preferred to live in the cities where the cafés flourished.) It was months, for instance, before the fitters became convinced that screws screwed from left to right and unscrewed from right to left.

Now the Gravel Plant was really a complete industry in itself, consisting as it did of the quarries up near the Persian

foothills, the eighteen-mile connecting railway, and the terminus on the river, where the raw material from the quarries arrived by train at hourly intervals day and night. Here it was taken hold of by a complicated system of belts and elevators, and by these carried along, taken up, mixed with water, tumbled over and over in washers, and separated from the finer materials. After it passed through sizing screens it fell into storage hoppers only to be carried off again, but now in different proportions, by more belts and elevators, and shot down into the waiting barges.

The finer materials (sand) went through a different process after separation from the larger stuff. It was washed thoroughly to remove the silt and dust of years and then dredged from the washer by slowly moving scrapers onto another system of belts and then down in chutes into other barges bound for Kut.

The barges were taken up the Tigris by tugs that had been used during the war. They had names such as *Taaza*, *Tewfic*, and *Ishan*. Their stories, if they could have told them, of horror and death during the fighting in Mesopotamia must have been pretty ghastly. Depending on whether the river was low or in flood, the journey to Kut with gravel took anywhere from twenty-four to forty-eight hours or more.

We came to know the *Taaza* and the *Tewfic* and the *Ishan* as personalities, and when their names were mentioned we felt that we were speaking of friends.

Then, too, there were three large, white passenger steamers, built before the war, which passed our house on their trips up and down the Tigris. After a short time we grew to depend on seeing them at intervals. And indeed, we saw a lot more of them than we did of our human friends.

Their names were *Zenobia*, *Miramar*, and *Medjidia*. Our imaginative First Boy named our three white geese after them.

The site of the quarries near the foothills, eighteen miles away from us, came to be called the *Wadi* (which means dry river bed or valley). Up there one felt very far removed. In comparison with the remoteness of the *Wadi*, our house on the river seemed like the center of things.

We began to like the *Wadi* and in the coming months we often drove up with Douglas or Henri in the same spirit that we would have taken a ride in the country on a Sunday in America. We had daydreams about building a house there one day. But the workmen, or coolies, as they are called, felt quite differently about the *Wadi*. They had to be coaxed as if they were children to live and work at the quarries for any length of time. The isolation and loneliness made them yearn for their women and families. The bright lights of the local coffeehouse on the river near our house acted as a magnet.

While working at the *Wadi* these coolies lived in huts supplied by the Plant and made of mats and arched reeds from the marsh country. This type of hut was simple to construct and has been popular for thousands of years in lower Mesopotamia. Later on during the winter we began to notice that these houses disappeared one by one. On Friday there would be fifteen houses and on Saturday there would be only fourteen! When the number was reduced to ten, the coolies, on being questioned, made the same answer as Don Marquis's Mehitable made to Archy when asked where her kittens were that she had left in the rain barrel just before a storm: "What kittens?" she said.

"What houses?" said the coolies blandly.

The solution was that these mats made wonderful fuel for a cozy fire on a cold winter night. So, quite regularly, new huts had to be built to replace the missing ones.

The works at the quarries consisted of a drag scraper driven by a Diesel engine which carried gravel to a loading tunnel. From the loading tunnel the gravel fell by gravity into railway

wagons or alternatively to a belt conveyor and so to a revolving screen from which the required sizes fell into the wagons.

Seven Diesel locomotives brought the wagons down by rail.

Sometimes at night we saw the headlight of a locomotive gleaming out of the blackness of the great empty desert. These lights came to mean evidences of life and order in this vast waste land. In time we grew to watch for them because they made the desert seem more friendly. Several evenings when we happened to be returning to our house from a long trip, we watched eagerly for the first glimpse of a locomotive headlight to welcome us back to our desert. It was the same with the floodlights of the River Plant. These lights were powerful and they were lighted throughout the night. When we were traveling on the road we could see them a long way off, shining and alive. They told us that we were not far now from home.

Since there was no electricity nearer than Kut, we had our own electric generating plants driven by Diesel engines to supply the *Wadi* and the River Plant with power and light. The house was wired from the Plant.

The Barrage itself for which the gravel was being supplied was in the process of construction. The idea was to bring irrigation to a great tract of desert between the Tigris and the Euphrates and so turn it into a fertile and habitable land. In a few years it should be as green with crops as it may have been thousands of years ago. The Iraqi government, as part of its scheme of development, will spend about five and a half million dollars in a three-year program to make this section bloom again.

The plan included digging a canal to connect the Tigris with the Al-Gharraf River which runs north and south between the Tigris and Euphrates. By controlling the water flow of the Tigris into the Al-Gharraf, irrigation will be made possible.

In an undertaking of this kind in a country which has just started to do things for itself, the unexpected, naturally, plays a big part.

All plans concerning the Barrage seemed cut and dried and the scheme well laid out. But setbacks occurred. When the construction was well advanced the most severe and sudden flood in years caused so much damage that work was prolonged for another year. As to the Gravel Problem here, it looked pretty nearly foolproof. But it turned out that when you added up the serious delays in delivery of machinery from England, the vicious floods, exceptional heat, strikes, transport problems and other unexpected hurdles, then every day meant trouble and excitement somewhere.

As the months went by, Gravel crept into the conversation at the most unexpected moments.

Sometimes it occupied whole lunch hours or early morning tea times. Often in the face of a locomotive off the track or a rise in the river that threatened to wash away the railway line, painting became a very dull subject indeed to talk about. Politics were boring. And no one listened when the newest book was criticized. Gravel always won at a time like that.

On the bank of the Tigris, between the house and the River Plant, there was a sad patch of ground.

It was bumpy and cut up by old canal ditches that were forgotten and half filled in. Filth was spread about everywhere and garbage had been dumped here and there in little piles. In the middle of this waste was a small palm tree, green and proud of its uncared-for branches. Around it were many smaller palms which were then only little blades of green just up out of the earth.

Farther away from the river was a row of small, flat mud houses. These were the servants' houses. Still farther away were the squat quarters of the Plant storekeeper and the clerk

and three fitters. A rambling mud building housed the Indian foreman. And here and there stood a few reed huts. Around all the houses were wavy reed fences enclosing little yards for the women to do their housework in. (No man but their husbands was supposed to see them.)

Outside these reed fences there was neglect and untidiness.

Beyond the servants' houses, near the road, was the local café, Jassim's café, which was very popular with the workmen on the Plant. Women did not go there. Jassim owned various animals (the kinds that smelled the worst). They strayed everywhere, and later on, everywhere usually meant our beds of young peas and beans. Once we captured two of his goats and held them for two days as prisoners for ransom in the form of a promise from Jassim that he would watch his animals in the future.

Beside the café was a shallow canal. Its muddy and smelly water zigzagged from a sand washer at the Plant. It was on its way to irrigate a patch of turnips across the road. Many bits of garbage floated merrily on their way in the water, though the stream had been fairly clean when it left the Plant. Eventually, it came to seem normal to us to see teapots and dishes (not ours, we hoped) washed in this water, but we never got used to seeing a child dip an old soup tin into the stream and drink from it.

During our first week we examined every inch of this ground between the house and the Plant.

The first day we made a general tour. On the following days we poked our heads around every corner. As we looked, plans went through our heads. We had decided to build the dining room, but now we could see that, besides the building, it was urgent that we work on a general Scheme for Improvement. We stood and viewed the grounds from all angles. The more we looked the more expansive our schemes became. What we saw now was not what was really there. A beautiful

and tall eucalyptus tree grew beside the doorway of the Cook's house, giving cool shade. A cluster of trees hid the wavy reed fences. Gardens covered the uneven waste ground. There were graveled paths and the place was as neat as a pin. Away in the distance in a clump of trees was our house, set off by charming and intimate gardens. We could smell the flowers already.

As we stood rooted to the spot our visions enchanted us.

It would be a long hard job, all this. . . .

We remembered the many times when friends in America had asked the familiar question:

"What in the world will you two *do* in Iraq?"

We knew now the answer to the question.



VI

Murder in Mesopotamia

THERE WERE SHARKS IN the Tigris. One day they ate up a little boy. It was very sad but it was also alarming, especially since we ourselves had been swimming every day in order to get relief from the intense heat. The thermometer registered 120° in the shade.

We had heard rather vaguely about these sharks. During certain months of the year they come up the river from the Persian Gulf. They go as far as Baghdad, and every once in a while they do some damage.

Though we knew that a shark has the obvious right of way in any body of water, we went right on with our daily swim. But we took precautions. We stationed Sayed Hassan on the bank to watch for us.

Sayed was our personal bodyguard. He had been introduced to us the first day we arrived, and he was told to follow us whenever we went outside the house. He was to keep fifteen paces behind us. It had not been established what attitude the Arabs would take towards two strange women in such an isolated place. So Sayed was chosen. At least he *looked* fierce enough to protect or destroy anything.

But there was another idea behind all this.

Sayed was a bandit. In fact he was the biggest bandit in the whole district, a really first-class robber. Therefore it was considered wiser to pay Sayed more to refrain from robbing us than he could possibly get by following his regular occupation with us as the victims. Then again he knew all those who belonged to his profession. He had a reputation for striking terror into the hearts of the less obviously brave.

All these circumstances worked together to make him the best choice for a personal guard.

When Sayed stood on the shore to watch out for shark intruders, he appeared very important. His flowing robes were weighed down in places by nasty-looking knives, curved daggers, and an old pistol. Besides those weapons he carried a horrible-looking club. This was nicely carved so as to leave sharp protruding points at the most practical places.

Sayed's face was dark. His grand mustachios, which swept across and down, ended up somewhere behind the hanging tails of his headdress. These emphasized his sinister appearance. He seemed always to be waiting for some signal from us to shoot or cut to bits anyone who might annoy us.

Had we reasoned it out, though, we would have known that no respectable shark would actually have been afraid of Sayed. A shark could have gulped us down with great relish and even belched in the polite Arab fashion, before Sayed could have decided which weapon to use. But Sayed looked impressive and therefore he was reassuring to us.

Sometimes when we walked along, Sayed bringing up the dignified rear, we felt almost in a class with Mussolini or Hitler.

Sayed Hassan had another duty beside that of guarding us. He became nursemaid to Boycat and Girlcat.

Boycat and Girlcat astonished the Arabs who were usually under the impression that they were little dogs. These two

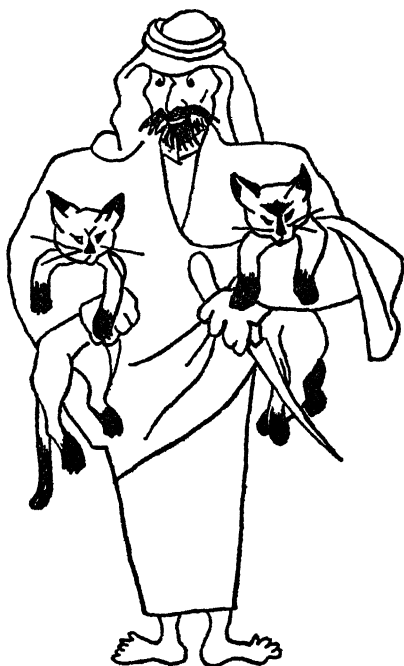
had never lived anywhere but in a New York apartment. For the first time in their lives they were set free in the open, and since we were not sure what would happen to them in this strange country, we commanded Sayed to watch over them.

This Grade A bandit ought certainly to have been humiliated in this particular assignment. But apparently the weird appearance of the two cats must have added to Sayed's prestige, for he bragged about his duties to the other servants. Sayed would stand at attention, sword in hand, while his charges scratched in the sand. At these moments he looked as if he would welcome an intruder just so that he might wield his sword in the cats' defense. On some occasions we wondered if it might not be very revealing had we understood some of the Arabic words that he murmured so endearingly to them. We were sure now that Girlcat was about to have her first kittens, and Sayed pointed out the obvious fact to each newcomer.

What would Sayed Hassan really do in an emergency, we wondered. Sometime later we discovered that he was as bad as he was said to be. For one day while off duty he got peeved at a passer-by and for no reason in particular, and very unromantically, he hit him over the head, lead-pipe fashion. He nearly killed his victim. Sayed went to jail and thereby we were set free. But this happened after we had got used to our new surroundings and were not afraid to go unattended.

One day Sayed asked if he might have the afternoon off. When we questioned him, he said that his little son had died and that he must bury him. We were much upset. Death seemed to have come very close.

Sayed appeared to be sad indeed. We gave him our willing permission. He went down the road, walking in the direction of Ali Gharbi. We asked many questions of the other servants: How old was the child? What had he died of? And why had they not called Sayed when his son was taken ill?



We talked almost in whispers for the rest of the day.

But in the evening when we told Henri about it he was less impressed.

"Sayed is pulling your leg," he said, "but if it *is* true, he will surely see to it today that he creates another child to take its place."

As a matter of fact we found several months later that the child was still alive, though he looked unhealthy and as if his father's statement might come true at any moment. Sayed merely wanted an extra holiday.

The percentage of infant mortality is astoundingly high in the country. The causes are mostly undernourishment, ignorance and unsanitary conditions. Habitual indifference to

these causes by the people only makes things worse, though the government has done much recent work to remedy the situation. Medical aid and doctors have been sent into the villages, and hospital stations have been established. But most of the uneducated and poorer Moslem women prefer to die rather than submit to examination or treatment by a male doctor.

As far as her children are concerned, a mother will attempt to keep them well by curious remedies and the invocation of charms. She thinks magic is much more potent than a glass of nourishing milk. She may ask for a piece of clothing from a healthy child to use as a sympathetic charm for her own sick offspring. She may go to seven boys by the name of Mohammed and beg from each a piece of silver, which she will have melted and fashioned into one piece to hang on her ailing son. Thus she invokes certain influences in which she has full faith. In some cases a vow to go begging in rags will induce the Powers to grant health to a loved one. Often every possible charm and magic remedy is tried, but ordinary cleanliness and proper food are neglected.

Sayed Hassan was not the only guard. There was the Night Watchman whose name was Ali.

His special concern was the house. He was supposed to make the rounds at night and communicate regularly with four or five of his brotherhood who guarded the plant. A series of whistling signals was the usual method of calling to one another.

Those first nights we found out why so many guards were necessary. We two were sleeping on the roof at that time, all done up in Flit and mosquito nets. While we tucked the corners of the nets under our mattresses one night, we tried to figure out how to tackle the Problems of Living before us.

Suddenly the night life of Brooksville (as we had begun to

call the place) began. We were terrified. Whole packs of jackals howled, and all the dogs of Iraq woke up from a sound sleep to do their night's barking. A wolf put in a note or two, and a sort of wildcat across the river had apparent coloratura ambitions. Queer sounds began in the grounds below. We shook in fear of the much-talked-of robbers. Then we heard an exchange of piercing whistles between Ali the Brave and the watchmen at the Plant nearby. After that, there was a scuffling commotion, gunshots and cries. Finally quiet. The robber must have got away (undoubtedly with something coveted by a relative of Ali which might later be found in his hut).

In time we learned to take these excitements more calmly.

Sometimes in this country, even such things as beds were whisked away from under the very noses of the guards—and from under the backs of those who slept in them. To scare away such night guests a system of guards was obviously not enough. We added a rather unique form of protection, which must have been a good deal more terrifying to potential robbers. We turned the radio on full blast and let it perform all through the night.

Imagine the discouraging effect of *Pagliacci* screamed out at you if you were a robber and had never heard a radio. Brünnehilde's battle cry to the Valkyrie would positively freeze you with terror. And modern jazz, coming from an unsuspecting Ritz-Carlton must many times in Brooksville have had a bad effect on the morale of a brave thief.

We heard of an Englishman who had another idea of protection. This man lived in Baghdad some years ago. He was a bachelor and lived alone except for a servant named Abdullah. Abdullah was valet, butler, and cook all in one. In the five years that Abdullah served his master there had never been any cause for the Englishman to mistrust him. Of course, there were petty stealings but nothing of any impor-

tance. The district, however, in which they lived was a dark and suspicious one. Robbers at night were not unexpected. The Englishman had heard many stories about them and what they might do, and so he thought out a plan whereby he could protect himself.

He called in a mason and explained to him what he wanted. The mason knocked a few holes in his bedroom wall through which to run a pull cord. The cord ran from beside the master's bed through the wall and down to a tiny room in the court where Abdullah slept. At night Abdullah was to tie his end of the cord to his big toe. In this way if the master was alarmed by curious or unusual noises he could yank the cord and rouse Abdullah who would rush to his aid.

There were no toe jerkings for a month or so. Everything was going along nicely. The Englishman was sleeping better since he felt secure, and there were no complaints, until one morning while serving the breakfast kipper Abdullah addressed his master.

"Sahib, you did not hear the robber last night?"

"Robber?" the master asked, much surprised.

"Yes, Sahib, one robber came, but I kill him." Abdullah brought on the coffee.

"Abdullah! What have you done with him?" And Abdullah led his master to the courtyard and pointed to the little waste hole in the center of the pavement. (In old houses it is into this hole that all waste is dumped. The pavement slightly inclines toward it and under the hole is a cesspool which is emptied periodically.)

"I put him in there, praise be to Allah!" cried Abdullah.

Sure enough there was a foot sticking up out of the hole. A fitting end for a thief!

The police were called, but when they pulled the body out they found it to be that of a respected Armenian shopkeeper. In the investigation it was revealed that the shopkeeper's



books showed a debt owed by Abdullah for cigarettes purchased during the past year.

In his own way Abdullah had planned to get rid of the silly bother of having to pay his debt. Instead he got thirteen years in which to figure out how not to get caught the next time.

But the Englishman was not the only one who had problems with his servants. Our troubles began early.

According to the Cook, the *dhobe* (washlady) ate soap and stole our firewood.

At least that was the Cook's explanation of the disappearance of enough soap to supply a whole laundry. As for the firewood, the *dhobe* carried away with her every day one stick of precious fuel hidden under her *aba*. We overlooked these little habits of hers because no one else could handle a sheet as masterfully or look as well doing it as she did.

We saw this *dhobe* for the first time on one of our exploring trips around the house and grounds. We turned the corner of

the kitchen yard and there she was, a tall figure draped in black, who would do credit to Alix the couturier. She was trailing her robes in the dust as she hung up the white sheets, dripping wet, on a line that stretched from one mud wall to another.

She had style. Every move she made created a new picture that could have been a page for a fashion magazine.

The *dhobe* was a widow. She brought her little boy with her every day so that he could help her. He could hand her the clothespins as she needed them, and he could run to the kitchen door to ask for more and more soap. The *dhobe* was also passionately fond of handkerchiefs (our handkerchiefs)—God knows why—and we were inconvenienced.

Her method of laundering was simple. She used soap and hot water in a flat copper pan that sat on the ground. To bend down to this wash tub she had to squat beside it, knees jutting up, and her brown arms lost in the suds and water. A mechanical movement of her hands, somewhat like the movement of a dasher inside a washing machine, did the job. She had no washboard, and the boiling of clothes was not even considered. All that remained to be done was to rinse the things sketchily and to hang them up to dry in the sun, rain, or dust, depending on the season. If the clothespins had gradually disappeared as they often did, then the wet articles were tied to the line by a corner, a shoulder strap, or a sleeve.

The *dhobe's* name was hard to remember in Arabic. It was Kowkub. We asked the Cook to repeat it many times before we were able to pronounce it properly. Kowkub, in spite of its ugly sound to us, was a popular name.

The Cook was a cocky little Indian. He himself puzzled us but his name was easy. It was Yusef.

The first time we went into the kitchen we felt tragedy in the air. There on the table was *another* custard pudding all ready for dinner. We guessed the rest of the menu with no

trouble whatsoever. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding! Something must be done to remedy the monotony. We had sat down to roast beef, Yorkshire pudding, and custard every night since we arrived.

But what could be done? We suggested a salad. The Cook went into a long explanation about something that was completely lost on us. We could not understand him until he said it over and over. His English was very, very pidgin. Finally we got the idea.

There was no lettuce!

Each of our suggestions met with an unsurmountable difficulty. So we put off the problem until we had found out more about food in Iraq.

Even if Yusef had not talked in that garbled way we would still have been terrified of him, because on the very first night his story had been whispered to us. He had been donated to us by an Englishman who lived a hundred miles away. During the five years that he had spent with this Englishman, Yusef had been an inspired cook, but he had a bad habit of poking a long-handled fork into the rest of the staff. At first no one had minded very much, but when a knife replaced the fork, then it was time for Yusef to be transferred to another setting. The new setting happened to be our household.

We wondered which weapon we would rate.

You would never have read in Yusef's face that he was a rascal. He would burst into his best smile just before you began to scold him. He was discourteous only when he was drunk, and then, he claimed, that was not his fault.

Sometimes he covered up his natural greasiness and his dirty clothes with a dirtier khaki jacket that did not show the dirt so easily on account of its color. At first Yusef had to do the serving as well as the cooking, since when we came he was the whole servant staff except for a Sweeper and a Latrine Boy.

That first day in the kitchen, as he stood there beside his custard pudding, he went on to ask us a question that seemed to need an answer. Again we could not understand him. He explained over and over, each time with a little different combination of words, until finally it was clear that he must go to Amarah, a day's journey away for him. There he must hire more servants to complete the staff: a First Boy, a Second Boy, and numerous others. He said that he would return in two days' time—unless God willed otherwise or unless his wife was having another baby in Amarah where she lived at the moment.

In the meantime we were to be left under the care of the Gardener and the Latrine Boy.

Dubious as to the qualifications of these two, we stepped out to the Tigris. There at the point where the Sweeper daily drew the drinking water, we saw that the river was back-flushing. It looked foul. We had visions of all the horrible diseases of the Orient: typhoid, cholera, dysentery, bilharzia, and many other things.

We did not use a modern filter for our drinking water. We used the native method which consisted of the dripping from one porous jug filled with water into another jug just below, a method that was probably as popular with the ancient Sumerians as with the present-day Iraqis.

A moment later, however, we realized that this backflushing was a small matter in contrast to what we saw nearby. The Latrine Boy was in the act of emptying the latrine pails into the river just *above* instead of far *below* the spot where the drinking water came from!

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VII

The Servant in Thy House

A WEEK LATER YUSEF came back from Amarah. He brought three rather soiled-looking ruffians. These three, Yusef said, together with others that he had hired from Ali Gharbi, and Kowkub and the Gardener and the Latrine Boy, were to do our work for us.

So now we had a staff of God knows how many servants who seemed to be waiting around for chances to knife each other between the soup and the fish. The reason for such a large staff was the fine distinction between duties: for example, the boy who washed the cups did not wash the saucers.

The servants were headed by Abbas the First Boy. He called himself butler and assumed control, shouting orders to those in the lower ranks. He had, he said, worked for the best families in Basrah and at the British Club in Baghdad. This information was meant to stagger us. Someone had, however, stolen all his references, so unfortunately he had none to show us when he came.

We were suspicious of the look in his shifting eyes, but we put it down to our own inexperience with these people. And we were surprised at the slack way in which he served, but

only wondered a bit about what sort of a job he had really had before he came to us.

Besides his monthly wages Abbas was to receive from us two new white gowns, a European jacket to wear over the gowns, one pound of tea a month, three pounds of rice, and a little piece of meat each day. Yusef explained that feeding was not usually done, but that since we were nearly five miles away from a village it would be a good idea.

Abbas had brought his family with him from Amarah, his untidy wife and sore-eyed child and his father as well. They were already settled in their allotted room in the servants' quarters. We felt that quite a little migration had taken place from Amarah to Brooksville.

Then there was the Second Boy who could not have been called a second butler no matter how far you stretched the word.

We found out later that he had never before set foot in a kitchen but had been a gardener for some American missionaries years before. That, he felt, qualified him for anything. He in turn ordered his inferiors about with a dictatorial flair (when the First Boy was not around). According to Yusef he was also to be supplied with food, but a little less food as befitted his lower rank. He was to receive monthly one pound of tea, two pounds of rice and *no* meat. Besides this, he too was to have several new long gowns.

Next in the social scale came the Sweeper, who did not sweep when he could bully his little brother or his grandfather into doing it for him—and there were always plenty of little brothers and grandfathers handy. We never ceased being surprised in this remote place at the appearance of so many strange people who seemed to have come from nowhere.

The rest of the staff called the Sweeper a coolie because it made them feel superior by comparison.

The Ironer, before he came to us, had been connected in some way with the hospital station in Ali Gharbi. We never found out what his job had been. He was in a class by himself and because he lived in Ali Gharbi he was to receive no food. Each day he walked the five miles to our house and back.

Before he had been with us very long he outgrew the old-fashioned box-like flatiron, which burned charcoal inside it and sometimes burned the clothes as well. He graduated to the electric iron. His sprinkling system was still rather primitive, however, and we felt that there was room for improvement. He would merely take a mouthful of water and blow it out expertly in a beautiful spray over the clothes.

Then there was Daud the Shopper. He was called the Contractor by the rest of the staff, but he looked like any ordinary Arab as he appeared each day walking along the river with his great basket on his head filled with meat and sugar and rice and other kitchen supplies. His skirts were tucked up around his waist and sometimes in the folds were special kidneys or a brain wrapped up in a grimy piece of red cloth. When these were not for our breakfast, they were a present for Boycat and Girlcat.

Daud shopped in the early morning market at Ali Gharbi for the best cuts of meat. Some days only one sheep and one beef were killed in the village and then we had to be satisfied with a roast that was not too tender or mutton chops that did not melt in the mouth. On those days Daud would usually bring back two or three live chickens. Because their feet were tied together with strings we felt so sorry for them that we kept them and fed them for months before we killed them.

Daud the Shopper also brought the daily mail.

Letters from New York and Paris and the South Seas together with *Vogue* and the *Financial Times* from London or sensational papers from Paris found themselves tied up with

a dirty piece of rag and laid carefully in Daud's basket next to a dripping liver. Anyone else who happened to come from Ali Gharbi to Brooksville also brought the mail. One day Yusef who was in Ali Gharbi on an errand was entrusted with an important cable from Egypt regarding a project in which Douglas was a consultant. The cable required an immediate answer. Yusef carried it around in his pocket for three days before he remembered to deliver it.

Daud had a daughter of twelve or thirteen or fourteen (the opinion varied, though Daud said twelve). He wanted to marry her off to Abbas the First Boy and he spent a good many hours in passing the time of day socially in our kitchen. But Abbas was already married and he did not have the money for two wives.

Lording it over the three gardening coolies was the Head Gardener, 'Brahim. 'Brahim was a Persian and we expected a Persian garden from him, but did not get it. He had a red-dyed beard and wore dull blue which made him very beautiful.

Part of the work of these four gardeners was untangling their fringed headdresses from their very long-handled shovels. It always seemed odd to us that the Arabs wore such inconvenient and awkward costumes. In winter, to avoid the mud, their skirts had to be twisted up around their waists; their *abbas* were always slipping off; and their headdresses got tangled up in everything. (Our own boys in the house caught them in the door handles and later in the door of the Frigid-*aire*.)

The Horseboy took care of the temperamental Arab stallion that belonged to Henri. The Horseboy's name was Abdul Kerim. Every day Abdul Kerim swam to work across the Tigris. He lived in Ali Gharbi and he was a thrifty soul. He did not like to spend the five *fil's* fare on the native boat that crossed the river daily.

Every morning on the opposite bank he would take off his clothes, tie them up in a bundle, and swim across with the bundle on his head. He never had an accident. On our side of the bank he would dress again and then he was ready to go to work for us.

Every few days Abdul Kerim managed to attract attention as a hero by carefully contriving to get himself bitten by the horse. This was not really as difficult as it sounds since the horse was really dangerous.

Later during the winter when Henri found that he had no time to ride his horse, he gave us permission to sell the restless animal if we could. We turned into gypsy horse dealers. Word went around and a customer appeared.

The excitement was terrific.

The horse stood on his hind legs and refused to be bridled. Even if he had behaved, deception concerning his gentleness would have been impossible, for Abdul Kerim had a nasty fresh bite on his hand and enjoyed showing it off.

We had prepared a little paper in Arabic which released us from all responsibility in case the horse did any damage to a new owner. After much bargaining, the sum of six and a half *dinars* (\$32.50) was agreed on.

The new owner signed the paper with his fingerprint and the deal was closed.

So Abdul Kerim was crossed off our list of employees.

But he still swam across the Tigris each day, for he got a job at the Plant as an assistant locomotive driver.

Then there was Sayed Hassan who, as we have explained, was the Cats' Nursemaid as well as our own Guard. He had built himself a reed hut just outside our fence, where he slept. Frequently at night when he was lonely in his hut, he exercised his privilege of using a whistle and we would hear him whistling away in code to Ali the Night Watchman at the house and to the other watchmen at the Plant. Ali the Brave

was an old man and we found in time that he sometimes slept right through these efforts of Sayed's to communicate with him in the lonely hours.

By the time, however, that we found out that Ali napped easily, we were not as frightened as we were at first, and we were even so bold as to walk about in the dark and stumble over the sleeping form of old Ali stretched out on the ground. We were glad on those occasions that he did not even wake up.

Nuri the Latrine Boy was the Sanitary-as-Possible Department. He was never supposed to be seen carrying his burden of pails to the river, but you could always count on him to be right on the spot when anything interesting was going on and especially when there were guests. Perhaps he felt privileged because we had often made sketches of him.

In our house only Nuri the Latrine Boy, lowest in the social scale, could read and write. He played scribe to the others. We would find him neglecting his duties and squatting on the kitchen floor in the act of writing a letter in beautiful Arabic characters, dictated by Yusef or even the Sweeper.

The only female servant was Kowkub, our handsome Washlady. But distinction between the sexes was not obvious from a distance, since the men literally do not wear trousers. They wear skirts.

For doing (or not doing) their duties these people were paid the following amounts each month:

	<i>Iraqi Dinars and fils</i>	
Yusef the Cook	5/	(\$25.00)
Abbas the First Boy	4/500	(\$22.50)
Motlog the Second Boy	2/750	(\$13.75)
Kowkub the Washlady	1/	(\$ 5.00)
Hahib the Ironer	1/500	(\$ 7.50)
Nasir the Sweeper	1/400	(\$ 7.00)

*Iraqi Dinars
and fils*

Daud the Shopper	2/500	(\$12.50)
'Brahim the Head Gardener.....	5/	(\$25.00)
Rauf } Coolies or assistant gardeners		
Hamid } and paid by 'Brahim who con-		
Jaffar } tracted for gardening job.		
Sayed Hassan our Guard and the Cats'		
Nursemaid	2/400	(\$12.00)
Ali the Night Watchman.....	2/400	(\$12.00)
Abdul Kerim the Horseboy.....	1/400	(\$ 7.00)
Nuri the Latrine Boy	750	(\$ 3.75)
Total	30/600	\$153.00

We paid the wages once a month. In order to prevent the idea that cash lay about in pockets and purses, we never kept any money at all in the house. In place of cash we used a system that we called a chit system. It was merely a block of blank forms which we filled in with the individual's name and the amount due him. These were later cashed by Simon, an Iraqi Jew from a village a little further away than Ali Gharbi, who was to become an indispensable help as the months went by.

Separately these chits seemed to represent very little, but when at the end of the month we looked through the pile of them and added them up, we were quite surprised at the amount in comparison to the services rendered.

But we were new in the country and it was to take a bit of experience before we were able to organize and adjust things to remedy the situation.

The kitchen itself was discouraging. Worse, it was filthy. The walls were black with the smoke of the kerosene stove which had apparently never been cleaned. The floor was of

cement and marked with many stains. Under cupboards and boxes there were sweepings and dirt. We had already found that here in Iraq it was almost impossible to throw anything away. Everything that went into the wastebasket in the other rooms was later preserved on the kitchen shelves along with the salt and pepper and bread and flour.

We decided to start from the very beginning.

An investigation of the servants' rooms might be revealing and give us some reason for all this untidiness.

We called on Yusef's family first. They lived in one room about twenty feet square. It was filled with the strangest collection of things very precious to Yusef. There were old dishes and glass jars which were only a little broken. There were many soiled clothes hanging from nails and string lines. On the window sills stood half-empty bottles (*arak* probably). A worn-out straw mat lay on the dirt floor, but in the corners heaps of dust had been swept and left. Piles of onions were drying here and there. A pot was steaming in the little recess in the mud wall which was used as a fireplace, although there was no flue.

Most of the living of Yusef and his family and his father was done in the small enclosed yard, so all the furniture was outside. There stood Yusef's high wooden bed which he had brought with him from Amarah. It was a very fine bed though it was bare of a mattress. But all in a heap and rumpled up on it, lay an ancient magenta-colored comforter. There were no other places to sleep that we could see, though mats or a board platform were customary. We wondered whether Yusef alone had the privilege of sleeping in the big bed.

On the railing that encircled this bed sat two very thin chickens while Yusef's child sat on the hard ground eating a piece of *kubz*, a round, flat native bread. Yusef's wife had just finished baking the *kubz* in the round mud-covered oven. Her



own hands, the bowl she was using, and everything about the place were dirty and sticky with flies. But when she took from the oven a lovely, brown, warm piece of *kubz* and handed it to us, we accepted it.

It was very good.

Our investigation had been revealing. It was very natural, thought we, that our pots and pans should sometimes be greasy and dirty if Yusef lived like this. But it was just a little unfortunate that Yusef should be the cook, of all things, and a good one at that.

We found on our rounds of the servants' quarters that Yusef's place was the dirtiest. The house of Ali the Night Watchman was startlingly immaculate, though his white cat who wore a ribbon (from our wastebasket), had had kittens on his onion heap the night before.

We instituted weekly inspection tours of the servants' quarters and daily investigations of the kitchen regions. We hoped that this might eventually lead to some improvement.

VIII

Bridegroom at Ninety

THE FIRST PERSON WHO came to our house was old Sheikh Nuri (pronounced "shake"). Nuri came barging along with his retinue, and they rode in great but ragged state.

We had been warned of his visit just five minutes before by Simon the Iraqi Jew who lived in the village called Sheikh Saad. Nuri got off his horse at the gate and came in to sit with us. The rest of the company waited for him with their stamping horses.

Simon, who had come to translate, suggested that Nuri might drink coffee, so we sent for Abbas to prepare it.

Nuri is the big Sheikh of the Beni Lam Tribe. He is a very tall old man and he wore a bright red beard. He dyed his beard with henna because it made such a beautiful color, and then, too, it hid his gray hairs. Except for this he was dressed like any Bedouin. He wore the big brown *abba* that falls in many folds, and under this was the hint of a European jacket and the regular skirted dress which they all use. Boycat and Girlcat liked the fringe on Nuri's draped headdress. But Nuri did not like the cats. He was not even interested in seeing the

new kittens that had arrived a few days before, and of which we were so proud.

The Sheikh had exciting news. He was going to marry a new wife.

We congratulated him, and he told us that the girl was said to be very beautiful; that she was at this time being examined by the women of his tribe for proofs of virginity. She was thirteen years old; Nuri was over ninety, but he did not remember exactly. He smiled in what we interpreted as anticipation. Later we found that it was not considered polite by Arabs to speak of their women before strangers, but we had asked questions and Nuri could do no less than answer.

If the control board of female investigators found that the girl was not a virgin, then of course Sheikh Nuri would not marry her and she would be disgraced. If a woman is unfortunate enough to be unfaithful after marriage, then there is an obligation on the part of her father or brothers to kill her without more ado.

Abbas the First Boy came with the coffee. He began to pour it into little cups. Nuri interrupted him and asked him some questions which we asked Simon to translate. Nuri had wanted to know if Abbas had purified the pot and cups. Abbas had not done this so he took the tray away, and in five minutes he came back with another round of our expensive, imported American coffee.

The explanation was that we were unbelievers; the dishes in our house were therefore polluted. Nuri, a devout Moslem, would not drink from these impure receptacles unless Abbas had performed a certain number of washings and invoked the help of Allah. Even then when Abbas brought the second coffee he was obliged to swear to Nuri that he would take upon himself any responsibility for harm done to Nuri's soul from the cups and pot.

While all this went on, we made little drawings of Nuri,

one of us with a pencil and the other with color. He was too good to miss, his hawk nose and deep eyes and brilliant red beard. We presented him with one of the sketches, but he was not interested enough to look at it.

When he got up to leave, Nuri invited us to come to call on him in his tribal Guest Tent.

He asked us too if we had read about him in the English war books. We had and that pleased the old Sheikh. But the small paragraph he referred to merely mentioned Nuri and said some rather uncomplimentary things about the Bedouins of these parts.

As the Sheikh left and rode away with his crowd their *cheffiyehs* (headdresses) blew in tangles around their heads, and their *abbas* flying in the wind made them look at a distance like all the sheikhs we had ever read about, except that these were not so clean.

Thinking about Nuri and his thirteen-year-old bride, we asked Simon more about the marriage customs.

Simon was a good one to tell us things because he knew the people very well. He lent them money and he was kind to them. They in turn trusted him. They told him their secrets and asked his advice. They liked to work with him on his co-operative farm because he was sure to be honest with them. Simon was valuable in his capacity of paymaster and general go-between in case of labor trouble. Since all chits (we used no cash) which were given to our servants or laborers had to be cashed by Simon, he personally saw everyone who was in any way connected with house or Plant. For all of these reasons Simon knew the people inside out.

With all his activities and interests, Simon had time to talk to us when he stopped in on an errand. He became a great help to us, though at first he was shy about speaking English. He had never been outside his own country of Iraq, but he was more aware of the world's goings on than many persons



who live in London or New York. Simon had an idea of what we wanted to hear: information and stories about the country.

Simon was a little man who was growing bald. Although he was in his late thirties, he had only lately become engaged to a Hebrew girl who lived in Basrah. She was not yet through her school days, and Simon preferred to wait until her simple education was finished before they married. We saw her some months later and decided that she had walked right out of the Old Testament with her long braids and her serious beauty.

When Simon spoke of his Esther he forgot about anything else. Sometimes when he talked with us we tried to evade the subject because once he got started on her we could never steer him back to the tale he was to tell us.

Simon answered some of our questions about Arab marriages, but we found out much by ourselves as we went along.

We learned that no laxness of virtue was tolerated either before or after marriage; but the absolute blindness with which women went into this, the career of their lives, surprised us.

Was the thirteen-year-old girl, we wondered, pleased to marry Nuri? These girls seemed to approach their marriages with fear, eagerness, hope, and despair. We saw that in practically all classes marriage is arranged by the family without the girl's consent and sometimes without her knowledge. In most cases the bride does not see the man she marries until the day of the wedding, unless the groom is her cousin. (Men are given first choice of their female cousins as brides.)

In this matter of marriage the girl obeys her family. It never occurs to her to question their decision, though the gamble is certainly a tremendous one. It is possible and very probable that she will learn to love this man whom her family has chosen, for he is the only man that she will know outside her own family. At least she will not have anyone to compare him with, favorably or unfavorably.

We saw that the country woman has more freedom than the town woman. In some of the tribes the women are unveiled, using only the *abba* to pull across the face in case a man comes by. In towns, seclusion sometimes reaches a point where a woman is a prisoner in her own home.

The whole life of an Arab woman is concerned with her children and her husband and her household. Higher education is not often indulged in by women. Domesticity is her only recognized profession, except for the young and new profession of teaching. (There are a few scattered young women teachers in the schools who face this pioneer career with great courage. Gradually more of them are being trained in the schools.)

Apparently freedom is not a generally desired thing by the Iraqi women. Seclusion is still considered in this country a sign of man's respect and a protection from insult. Certainly

Sheikh Nuri had never seen his bride unveiled before their marriage and probably she had never seen the Sheikh. All the arrangements were made by him and the girl's family. Afterward if he disliked her or if she failed to bear him sons, he could easily divorce her as he had done with each of his former wives when he tired of them. Or if Nuri pleased he could have four wives at one time (the Mohammedan law allows it), but in that case he is bound in theory at least to treat them all equally. Because of this last restriction a poor man cannot afford more than one wife at the same time.

We decided to see Nuri's bride for ourselves. So two weeks after the Sheikh's visit we acted on his invitation.

Meantime we had found out that he owned great tracts of land in our district. It was from him that Douglas rented the strip of land from the river up to the *Wadi*. Nuri had once been a very wealthy Sheikh and the tribe had been a large and rich one, but in the years since the war they had gradually lost their prosperity and become less important. Nuri owed taxes to the government and had debts everywhere.

Simon offered to drive us down to where the Beni Lam's old Sheikh was quartered with his family and some few hundred tents. We were eager to see the new bride.

We had heard since Nuri's visit of her fabulous beauty. Everyone seemed to know about her, but no one could claim to have actually seen her. It was rumored that she had been tattooed especially to Nuri's taste in a design that covered her whole body. Her face was said to be flawless, and she was much envied by other women. We were not sure that we would be privileged to see her but chances were pretty good.

In any case this visit to Nuri ought to be worth the discomfort of a drive on a hot day. The thermometer registered 115° in the shade.

When we arrived at the camp we were ushered into an enormous guest tent, twenty-five or thirty feet wide and forty

feet long, with two sides open. It was made of black goat's-hair cloth which the Bedouin women weave themselves. Practically all sheikhs maintain guest tents, large or small according to the standing and wealth of the sheikh and his tribe. Later on we were to be entertained in a modern brick building, called a guest house, belonging to a very rich Sheikh in the rice country.

In Nuri's tent we sat cross-legged on exquisite carpets which were spread on the ground.

"Why do you wear black?" asked Nuri after he had greeted us. Later when we had seen the colors that adorned the lady of his heart and harim we understood why he thought we looked somber. But at least we were more comfortable in our simple black cotton. The Sheikh himself was in white with a thin brown *abba* across his shoulders. He sat patting a baby camel which he said was sick, but to us the baby seemed only bored with life in his fuzzy camel's-hair coat.

New arrivals came every few minutes until the tent was almost crowded. Each newcomer went up first to the Sheikh, took his hand, kissed him on the cheek, and then sat down to wait and watch.

Beside us squatted a *Seyyid*, a holy man, supposed to be a descendant of Mohammed. He wore the distinguishing turban of the *Seyyids*, made of a bright green cloth. Simon said he was most revered and loved by the people in this section.

In the tent, coffee was being made. It smelled good but the fire gave off unpleasant fumes. It was probably a camel dung fire. First the coffee had been roasted, then ground, and now it was being brewed by shaggy-looking fellows with aquiline noses, beards, and bare feet. They had time to watch us, too, and speak about us among themselves.

Everyone seemed interested when we asked Sheikh Nuri if we could visit the harim. The Sheikh sent a messenger to command the young wife to prepare herself for our call.

While waiting for her to get ready, a tribesman came offering coffee to us. On the tray which he held before us was a long-nosed copper pot (like those you see in Oriental Gift Shoppes in Greenwich Village) and several tiny cups. The tribesman poured only a few drops at a time into two cups and passed them to us. After we had drunk this, he poured another portion of the same quantity, and after the third time we knew enough about their etiquette to refuse more.

According to Simon, there was an explanation for this careful pouring. Because we were unbelievers, and therefore impure, great care had to be taken that the vapor, in pouring, did not go back into the spout and so defile the pot. To avert this catastrophe, they did not pour a steady stream, but only those few drops at a time so that the vapor had no time to rise. Simon said later that the *Seyyid* warned them to be careful during the pouring.

At any rate the coffee tasted extraordinarily good. But it was as different from ours as tea is from coffee. The Arabs manage to get a spicy, herb-like flavor and perfume into their coffee, which makes a totally different drink of it.

At sundown Nuri prayed. He called out for something that sounded to us like "Turbah," whereupon someone passed him a little brick of sacred earth from the city of Kerbala. The old Sheikh knelt down and bent over, laying his forehead on the tiny brick which had sanctified the ground for him, and proceeded with his prayer. (Some months after this we saw those sacred bricks stacked up in neat little piles in the bazaars of the sacred city of Kerbala. But they were not for sale to unbelievers like ourselves.)

Word came from the harim: "The bride is prepared for the visitors!"

We were led through a corral full of horses, into an adjoining big black tent. Of course Simon could not come with us here.

Seven or eight old women and many children stood waiting to greet us. One of them pulled out a mattress and a pillow for us to sit on. There behind us was a surprising sight: rows and rows of vividly-colored quilts and blankets were stacked up as evidence of wealth in the drabness of this desert. At the time we were amazed, but afterward we were to see collections that completely overshadowed this one.

The old women flocked around us and then the girl bride came.

We expected a Scheherazade after all we had heard about her, but even if she had been much less beautiful than she was, she would still have seemed lovely in contrast to the toothless old hags, wrinkled, sagged and hennaed, who surrounded her.

She seemed to us typical of Bedouin girls of her age, except that she was richly dressed and had more jewelry. We told her in a kind of "*parlee-voo-français*" Arabic that we were more than twice her age. But we must admit that we were catty enough to suspect a mistake in their figures.

As a matter of fact, the Bedouins are not always sure of their ages. A few years can be forgotten here and there, because they keep no record of their births. But ask a Sheikh the age of his mare and he can tell you to the day because that is a matter of great importance to him.

For our benefit the girl was dressed up in all her finery. Dressing up meant putting on everything she owned, one gown over another, to show the richness of her wardrobe. Hence the bride of Sheikh Nuri was comparatively bulky under the blue gown that hung straight from her shoulders, and trailed into whatever happened to be under her bare feet when she walked. This gown was made of silk from Japan, with huge pink and green flowers printed all over it. Covering this dress the girl wore a white wool *abba* embroidered in silver at the neck. Over this was a brown *abba* embroidered in gold.

Whatever was under the blue gown was not deliberately displayed except at a confiding moment when the bride proudly pulled out from the opening at her throat a bit of lace and pink cotton, obviously the top of an underslip. (Neither of us felt inclined to show off our Macy numbers at two ninety-nine each. Probably the shoulder straps were jerked loose anyway, from the constant getting into and out of our cross-legged positions.)

Here and there in the bride's costume there were evidences of other garments under the blue dress. A bit of red satin hung from below her hem, and a green ruffle escaped somewhere at the neck. We fingered our own little cotton dresses and thanked whoever was responsible for it that we were born in Minnesota instead of the East.

The bride had just combed her hair. It fell in fresh wet bangs and braids. (The Bedouin women are said to use camel urine on their hair, but we refrained from asking about this.) All sorts of beads and bangles hung from her head, silver, amber, gold filigree. She wore two large nose rings, and bracelets clanked on her wrists and ankles. All of her fingers were covered with rings, and there were plenty of blue turquoise-colored stones to keep away the Evil Eye.

Nuri's bride seemed happy enough. She laughed and showed her gold teeth. Surely the Sheikh valued her highly, for gossips said that he took extra precautions to keep her from harm—and from the eyes of all male members of the tribe, especially his own sons! We also heard in a roundabout way that Nuri was seeking medicines to restore his youthful vigor.

We joined Nuri again in his tent, and he asked us to stay for dinner, which meant the usual roasted sheep and boiled rice (and the sheep's eye to the honored guest). We decided to forgo the pleasure this time.

Then Nuri offered us a gift.

"Take," he said, "a mare or a camel!"

Then he looked around and finally pointed to the rugs on the ground.

"Or a carpet, perhaps?"

For us it has always been difficult to refuse a gift. But in this case had we accepted a nice grumbling camel, for instance, we knew that the old rascal would probably come the next day to ask in return one of Douglas's precious locomotives.

"Presents," we said, "are unnecessary. We consider it enough of a privilege to come to talk to you!" And Nuri chuckled over this, as he promised to come again to call on us.

"*Bacher*," he said, which means tomorrow, literally, but in practice seldom means anything less than two weeks, if ever.

IX

Building

BY THIS TIME THE PROSPECT of building was taking up a lot of our attention. We had already decided to start with the dining room.

It had sounded easy. Everyone builds houses. All over the world. But we could not get a start even on paper. Although we had used up a whole notebook, we were no nearer the actual solution.

First we could not decide *where* to put the dining room. We built an imaginary one off the pantry (which was our temporary dining room). Then we tried walking toward it as if the door were already cut through and the new dining room already there. We pretended we were guests entering from the salon. Then we pretended we were the First Boy walking from the kitchen. Neither of these experiments helped us make up our minds.

Then we went outside and studied imaginary lines and angles. We saw the dining room jutting out in turn from each of the four corners of the house. Toward the South it would knock over the only trees we had. Toward the East it would face the kitchen yard. We could not build it toward the West,

facing the river, because the arches of the open terrace ran along the whole side of the house. So the North won.

We would use the dining room wing as one boundary of the open court that we planned to have later between the main house and the future studio. The studio would make the third side of the enclosure which would then open toward the river. It would be perfect.

We saw ourselves sitting in the open court in deck chairs. On the table between us were lovely ice-cold lemonades. Some sort of trees waved their branches over us and offered a cooling shade. Colorful awnings protected the new dining room and the studio from the glare of the sun. It was a composite picture of Mexico, the South Seas, and Minnesota in the summer time.

All of these accessories eventually appeared in our court, but they turned out to be the Iraqi versions.

Once we had decided on the location of the dining room, all that was necessary was to draw up the plans for it, decide how many windows there should be and where the fireplace should go. Douglas and Henri began to get as excited as we were over the planning. Tea hour was devoted to arguments and displays of temperament. It was surprising how heated we became over a mere dining room. (Unfortunately, it was always to remain a source of argument. Each of us was to claim the successful features of this room as his own original idea.)

Finally our floor plans were agreed upon; that is, almost agreed upon. There was now only a ten-foot difference between our various opinions of what the length of the room was to be. Small differences such as these could be settled on the spot when *we* gave the instructions to the masons. The room was to be thirty to forty feet long with an elevation four feet high running along one side to form a kind of platform. Into this the fireplace was to be built. Steps would lead up to the platform at one end, and by walking across it one could

make an exit through an archway at the other end where more stairs led up to the roof.

We announced that we would start to build our dining room the next morning.

Henri said that he would find out if the mason was ready.

The following day nothing happened.

When we inquired we were told that in the rush of the day's work Henri had forgotten to ask the mason.

So we suggested that we would begin to build the *next* day.

But that day the mason went to Amarah to visit his uncle whom he had not seen for a year. He would not be gone long. He would come back in ten days. Then he would start work for us at once, that is, just as soon as he had finished a small job for the Plant. He had only to repair the roof.

During the next two weeks we tore up all the plans for the dining room, changed the whole layout and were back where we had been at the beginning of the building project. Then one day without warning we were awakened earlier in the morning than usual.

The mason had arrived. He was waiting and ready to go to work for us. The mason's brother had also come. Would we tell the mason and his brother where we wanted them to begin?

We were not very sure ourselves. We had had too much time to think it over. But we had made up our minds that once the mason (and his brother) arrived, nothing would stop us. So we went outside and marked off on the ground the measurements for the new dining room. Since we could not make head nor tail of the mason's tape, we used our walking sticks as measures. Now that we had started the new dining room, it would soon be ready for use. (Allah willing, the mason and his brother would have amended, had they known what we were thinking.)

After we had placed large stones at the corners of the future

room, the enclosed space seemed much too short. We added another stick-length or so and we were afraid to change our minds again lest our uncertainty inspire the mason to use his own judgment.

A few minutes after we had left them the masons sent word through Abbas the First Boy to ask where the mud bricks were. A half-hour later the mason came himself bringing Abbas along to interpret.

"*Khatun* (Lady)," said the mason, "the bricks are not ready. They are not dry enough. *Bacher* maybe. We will dig the trench now. Then we come back day after tomorrow to lay the dry bricks."

We were startled at the word *bacher*. We had already heard it several times. And even now when he spoke, it prolonged itself from tomorrow to the day after tomorrow and on into the indefinite future.

"But can't you do something else here while you wait for the bricks?" It seemed a shame to let the mason and his brother get away.

"But it will be only two days, *Khatun*."

After the two of the masons had gone we had plenty of time to wonder if we would ever start the dining room, much less finish it.

We sat down on the bank of the Tigris and waited. One waits for everything in this country, we thought. We could see how it would all end up. Somehow after the first few months of nail-biting, we would just settle down in the most comfortable chair and hope that no one would come along to suggest that we go anywhere or do anything.

But only a few days later the mason and his brother returned with the ten small boys. Work began in earnest and continued from early morning until late in the afternoon. Some days the progress was startling, but we learned not to be too optimistic. When it came time to explain the platform in

the dining room and the fireplace, we tried our best to get the idea across, but Yusef who was acting as interpreter that day did not understand our American and we still understood very little of his language, and the mason and his brother got more confused than if we had been speaking Russian.

Finally we called on Henri who spoke Arabic with authority. Henri explained everything. But the following day we were disappointed to find that a complete misunderstanding had arisen over the location of the fireplace. It was in the wrong place entirely.

Sometimes the work went on as though it were an old-established custom—this building of a dining room—and once started it would go on forever. We grew used to the mud that dropped all over the yard and the bricks that littered up the grounds. We would have missed the mason and his brother badly had we not seen them daily adding more bricks and mud to the walls of the new room. We were used to seeing the small boys filing through the gate from the pit where the bricks had been made. On their heads they carried stacks of bricks and flat bowls of mud mixed with straw.

While they worked they watched everything we did and they snickered shyly when we made sketches of them. They were dirty and ragged in their striped, long, night-dress garments. As the winter grew colder these gowns began gradually to be covered up with other people's cast-off coats and overcoats. One of these boys wore a girl's ragged winter coat with a ratty fur collar and cuffs.

When our Latrine Boy developed what was called a "bald head" (we suspected that it was something worse), we tried to engage one of the mason's boys for the job. But not one of them would consider taking the job even with the prospect of making twice as much money as the mason paid them. It was beneath their dignity.

The mason's boys were sons of the coolies who worked on

the Plant. They lived in the mud huts that were gradually forming a village in Brooksville. The mason paid them ten *fil*s a day. Had they been older they could have spent a good deal of time in Jassim's café with that much money. Ten *fil*s would have bought five cups of tea. They probably gave their earnings to their parents in return for *kubz* which they ate for lunch. At noon they would sit around the mudhole eating their *kubz* without much interest. Sometimes a bit of lettuce or an onion rounded out their menu, but even that did not seem of special interest to them.

The mason and his brother were Jews. They were quiet and efficient in their way and were fairly prosperous. Their long tunic gowns under European jackets were dull purple and plum in color. They had no idea that they made nice pictures against the mud walls they were working on, and they probably wondered why we suddenly stopped sometimes and looked at them.

They were not bad masons in their way, but their whole experience was in building Arab houses with no modern innovations. If we asked them to build a window a little differently from the way they had always built a window, they became confused. Since they had never worked with women, and especially with women who had ideas of their own, they were suspicious of our judgment.

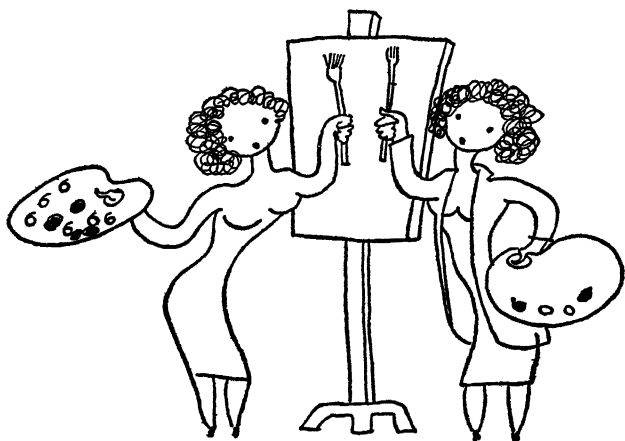
When it came to the windows, neither the mason nor his brother could understand our measurements. They both stopped all the work and came to ask us about it.

"But, surely, you have made a mistake," said the mason.

"No, the windows are to be six feet high and four feet wide."

"And you want how many?" the mason's brother asked sadly.

"But we have told you how many. There are to be three on one side and one on the other."



"And then there will be the open arch on the balcony," reminded the mason.

"Yes, but what is the matter?"

"It will be very hot in the summer, this room."

"And cold in the winter," we finished.

The mason and his brother were surprised that we admitted it. They gave up and walked away dejectedly.

We had been warned many times about these windows. Douglas and Henri had both told us that large windows let in unbearable heat and light in the summer and bitter cold in the winter. Douglas had said, Why not just put up a tent, if we wanted the room all windows? We were still under the impression that here in Iraq the habit of living too much in the dark made life a dull thing. Darkness was all right in the summer, but in the winter it would be different.

"If you will only wait and see how cheerful this room will be," we told them. "A dining room must always be airy and light. And anyway we must have large windows to admire the view. In the summer we'll hang heavy curtains."

We had no idea as yet how uncomfortable a winter in Iraq

could be. We did not foresee the blasts of icy air that would blow through window frames made by the local carpenter.

Early in the building the mason had announced that we would need more *juss*. We were going to plaster the inside wall with it and use it, too, as a mortar for the burned brick of the fireplace and the studio later on.

We gave the message for more *juss* to Henri. Then we crossed it off our shopping list. Henri passed it on to Simon. Simon sent out the word that ten ton of *juss* was required by Mr. Brooks.

Ten days later while we were having tea we heard a great noise outside. We were startled to see camels crowding at our gate. There must have been a hundred of these apparently unhappy animals who were growling and gurgling their disapproval. Arabs were shouting at the camels and the confusion was almost alarming.

The *juss* had arrived!

These camels had brought it all the way from the Persian foothills where it had been dug up from the earth, placed in sacks, and loaded on the backs of the camels. Each one carried two large sacks and it took ten camels to carry one ton of *juss*.

The price of the *juss* was 750 *fiils* a ton. Thirty-seven dollars and fifty cents (the total price of the *juss*) divided between twenty Arabs and one hundred camels was something we did not try to figure out. We were too occupied in thinking of a place to put the *juss*.

One morning the mason did not come to work. His brother did not come to work. The small boys were nowhere to be seen. There was a complete silence and the house seemed suddenly so peaceful that it was depressing. We wondered if there was a holiday.

Then we sent Abbas over to find out what was the matter;

we received a message from the mason that he would come to the house in ten minutes.

He appeared with his brother.

"You sent for us today?" they asked casually.

"What is the trouble? You have not come to work."

"There is no wood to use for the roofs."

"But surely there must be wood! Have you asked Simon?"

"Yes, he says that the wood is ordered from Amarah." He seemed contented with this. "It will be here very soon. Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps in two days, perhaps in a week."

A week! It suddenly occurred to us that we would need wood for the window frames and the doors, too. We wondered if that had been ordered. When we checked up we found that Henri had placed the order for all the building supplies weeks ago. We sat down again and waited. Finally the wood arrived—but that day was a holiday.

That meant a delay of twenty-four hours.

We wondered if difficulties and delays such as this had inspired the story about God and the pilot.

A pilot had invited God to go for a flight with him in his plane. God thought it over and decided that it would be a wonderful way of making an inspection of the world.

So they made an appointment for the following Thursday. The trip was to start from a well-known airport near Chicago. It happened that Thursday was a very fine day and the pilot thanked God for this, since the trip was to be a long one.

As they flew over the country toward the East, God seemed to be thoroughly absorbed.

After a short time he tapped the pilot on the shoulder and asked, "Where am I?"

"Why, this," said the pilot, "is New York."

"What?" exclaimed God. "Are you sure?"

"Absolutely."

"Why, how marvelously they've improved it! I would never

have recognized it. Do you mean to say that they have made all those new bridges? And all those wonderful parkways? What is that group of tall skyscrapers down there with statues and cafés with umbrellas?"

The pilot told God all about it.

"Well, really," said God, "I think they have done an excellent job!"

So they flew on.

Presently God tapped the pilot on the shoulder again. He pointed down to earth.

"Where am I?"

"This," said the pilot, "is London, and these islands are the British Isles."

"What? Do you mean to say that this down here is England? Well, I *am* surprised. I would never have recognized it. I say, have they really built all those wonderful museums and government buildings? Whatever was that great ship that lay in the port we flew over a little while ago?"

The pilot told him.

"My hat is off to the English!" exclaimed God.

A little later God tapped the pilot on the shoulder again.

"Where am I now?"

"That's Paris down there, part of France."

"What! Paris? How the place is changed! Be careful, don't run into that great tower in front of us. So they have made all those great palaces and parks and avenues? What in the world is that collection of all sorts of foreign-looking buildings and flags? Is it a world's fair?"

The pilot explained why some of the buildings looked African, some Chinese, and some South Sea Island.

"Well, wonders will never cease!" sighed God.

Next they passed over Rome. God was just as impressed with Rome.

Berlin was the same story.

By that time God grew sleepy. He had seen so much that was new to him.

When it began to grow warmer, God woke up. They had crossed the Mediterranean and now they were over Iraq.

The pilot turned to God, and then pointed down below.

"Look down there, God, that is—"

But God interrupted him, "Oh, no, I know where I am. I know this place *well*. This is Iraq—*just* as I made it!"

Once when this story was told to an old Arab, he added: "Yes, why should anyone improve on God's work?"

After the holiday the building went ahead once more. The roof progressed. Native reeds and mats were laid over the steel joists and the wood rafters. Bitumen on top of that and then straw. The roof was flat except for a slight slope so that the rain water could drain off through pipes that looked from a distance like gargoyles. They would spout out the water far enough from the building so that the mud would not be washed off the mud walls.

We ourselves took shovels and worked on the five steps that led up to the balcony. We cut them down where they swirled around the fireplace. In that way we showed the mason how we wanted them to be finished. It was easier than explaining to him through an interpreter.

The most exciting moment came when we knocked a hole through the wall from the house into the dining room. This hole became the arched doorway. Dust from the dried bricks filled the entire house, but it was worth it to get an inside look at the result of all our trouble.

We planned a grand opening for the new dining room. We would celebrate with a lunch on Wednesday. We invited the Mutasarrif (governor) from Amarah, for we had become

friends during the building period, and his Chief of Police and three officials.

At ten o'clock on Wednesday morning only half of the room was tiled. It had been plastered with *juss* only the day before.

We had given twelve o'clock noon as the dead line for the completion of the dining room. The mason and his brother were excited for once. When Abbas was too busy to interpret, Yusef ran from his task of cleaning the chickens to interpret for us. The mason's boys actually did more than saunter across the room. They were removing the excess cement off the face of the tiles with sand and straw. Everybody who owned shoes took them off, so that the freshly set tiles were not stepped out of place.

As soon as the tinsmith fitted glass into the window panes, we hung long white drapes at the windows. The many yards of stuff had only just arrived at nine that morning, and we had hurriedly sewed up the curtains on our sewing machine.

The carpenter hung the curtain poles just one window ahead of us. At the last moment we discovered that the dining room table would not go through the door, so one whole window frame had to be removed in order to get it into the room.

When the Mutasarrif arrived, the mason was still laying the last four rows of red tiles. In the months to come, we always remembered this particular lunch every time we noticed the zigzag pattern of these last rows of tiles.

While we waited for the dining room to be completed we entertained the guests in the salon by introducing Boycat and Girlcat and the cat children. Pounding went on in the dining room.

And then there was quiet, and finally Abbas came to the door and gave the signal that we could relax.

The dining room was finished.

It was three o'clock when we went in to lunch.

Of course, there were small details that were not quite finished, but they could be done later, we thought. But they were *never* done later. The dining room was as finished as it was ever to be. The building of the studio was close upon us.

X

Roof Garden of Eden

SOON AFTER WE ARRIVED there was a moon. Because of the moon we sat on the roof each night while we drank our beer. From up there the view of the Tigris was so much better. We could almost touch the moonlight. It hung clear and sparkling like cellophane.

To get to the roof we had to climb a ladder that would begin to quiver when we got to the middle of it.

Before we had gone up on the roof at all—when we were only *thinking* of how nice it would be to sit up there—we ran across a brochure from the World's Fair in Chicago. We had brought it along because one of the modern houses shown in it looked like what a house in Iraq *could* look like—if you had never been in Iraq. In the photograph there was a roof terrace with a ship's rail around it. Though we had no ship's rail, we did have tables and chairs. So on one of the first moonlight nights we made excited preparations as if we were expecting many guests, though we knew that the only ones who would arrive would be Douglas and Henri.

Abbas had to bring everything up to the roof by the ladder—tables, chairs, glasses, and cheesy things to eat with the

beer. The cheesy things should have been hot (but it took too long to get them up to us), and the beer should have been cold (but we had no ice). Nevertheless the evening was a success.

Each of us had a different view of what lay around us in the brittle moonlight. Perhaps the river view was the best view. Quiet sails slid along, not quite like things of this earth. Between the house and the river, the shadows of the trees seemed the only real things in the night.

Away from the river, looking in another direction, we felt the mountains. We knew they were there, too far away to see, reaching up to the sky and pressing down on the desert. We knew what heavy silence and what grandeur they possessed, but from here on our roof what we saw was the lonely, flat stretch of desert beyond the road. The Bedouins out there had let their fires go out, and their black tents in the distance were swallowed up in the silver of the moonlight.

The only real flaw was the sight of our iron bedsteads. They stood in a row on another part of the roof. All summer long these homely pieces of furniture would be the first thing we would see when we looked at the house, even from as far away as the road. The beds were painted white and the more elegant ones had a fancy touch of gold on them. As if the beds were not decorative enough in themselves, high metal frames for mosquito nets had been added, so that a kind of canopy effect was created. Over this canopy white mosquito nets were tied at night and taken down and folded during the morning. Sometimes in the rush of the day's work these trappings were forgotten and were left to wave about like flags in the wind; at night they looked like great white ghosts doing a chorus dance at Roxy's.

From then on, every evening we climbed to the roof for that hour. The first interruption came when we accepted an

invitation to dine with Arshad el Jamil, the Qaim Maqqam (mayor).

Arshad el Jamil was the mayor of the little village of Ali Gharbi, five miles up and across the River Tigris.

He came one day with the local judge to call on us. Simon accompanied them. We served tea which they drank with nine or ten lumps of sugar to each cup. Simon translated, since neither Douglas nor Henri was there.

Arshad el Jamil invited us to dine with him two days later. He was very polite in his tall, dignified way, and besides he wanted to learn English—and the Charleston too, he said. (In the Near East the Charleston is still spoken of as if it were the latest fad.)

The evening of the dinner, Douglas and the two of us started out in the car for the Qaim Maqqam's. We drove a few miles up the river and then left the car parked on the shore, crossing the river on the ferry that had been especially sent over to fetch us. When we landed on the other shore there was Arshad el Jamil waiting.

A crowd had gathered to watch the strange-looking women disembark. We were a side show to them. But they were totally unconscious of the exotic picture they made for us in their jumble of color and rags. They followed us when the Qaim Maqqam led us to the gate of his house, a flat-roofed affair built round a middle court.

We were seated in the usual circle in the court. There were cold drinks and wafers and nuts. The only other guests were Simon and the local doctor. The doctor said that he had just come from a case where a woman had died in childbirth. She had been attended by the women of her own family, while he, the doctor, gave directions from the next room. He was not allowed to attend to the patient personally due to the strict convention concerning the privacy of women.

As we sipped our drinks we looked around us. The place



was bare except for a fountain in the middle of the paved court. Water splashed merrily onto a row of potted green plants. A noisy kerosene lamp lighted the place with a glare. We could see by its hard light the vividness of the blue with which all the doors and windows were painted. One of these doors led into the kitchen, which in these houses usually managed to be far enough away from the dining room to allow the food to get cold on its way across the courtyard. Dishes that otherwise would have been very good were thus spoiled by their temperature.

It was nine o'clock when we were shown into the dining room, a small narrow room off the court. Though it was a hot night, the windows were tightly shut and curtained. We sat facing the row of windows and were fascinated by the elaborate, mail-order lace-over-cerise-pink-silk curtains. They gave a decided flavor to each course.

Laid on the table in intricate designs were flowers, ferns, and leaves. These wound themselves in and out, here and

there, occasionally strangling a salt cellar, but affording a perfect setting for the napkins that spread their fancy pleats out of the tops of the water glasses.

When we sat down at table the Qaim Maqqam read a long poem which he had written in our honor.

We went through the following menu.

(It was our host's idea of what a European sits down before each night. Arshad el Jamil would have been surprised had he known that we had hoped for a real Iraqi meal. He took it for granted that his food was not good enough for us. We did not know that it would be a long time before we could persuade an Iraqi to serve us his native dishes in place of what he thought we wanted.)

Soup

. . .

Syrian Olives Stuffed Eggplant

. . .

Fried Tigris Salmon

. . .

Meat Balls and Gravy

. . .

Fried Meat Patties

. . .

Macaroni and Clabber Milk

. . .

Roast Lamb
and Boiled Rice

. . .

Sweet Fried Fritters
with Rose Syrup Sauce

. . .

Chocolate Blancmange

. . .

Pancakes

Vanilla Sauce

. . .

Fruits, Dates, Nuts

. . .

Coffee

As we ate the Tigris Salmon, it struck us that the plates in which the fish was served were familiar. We had seen that blue flower pattern before. Where could it have been? Our curiosity increased with each course. A serving fork suddenly reminded us that we had the same pattern in our house! We were puzzled.

The Qaim Maqqam was polite in the best Iraqi tradition. Everyone was polite. When we said out of pure courtesy, "What a nice flower *that* one is," the host clapped his hands and called out loudly, "Abdul Ali!" or something like it, and in five minutes there was presented to us with a flourish the tree on which the rose had grown, all done up and ready to take home.

The women of the Qaim Maqqam's household did not, of course, put in an appearance. In this country women stay where they belong—in the women's quarters, called the *harim*. This is a man's world here in Iraq. But no doubt from behind some curtained upper window we were watched as we sat in the court. We must have been a subject for conversation for days afterward.

On the way home we crossed the Tigris again on the dark ferry and drove the remaining miles by car. We carried with us as evidences of the Qaim Maqqam's great hospitality one crate of special dates from Basrah, one trick cigarette box (it was pressed upon us when we wondered how it worked, and later when we had guests, it became the pride and joy of the butler to show it off), and finally, we carried off the rose tree

entire. Its feet were carefully wrapped in a sackful of earth, but its blossoms we wore in our hair.

When we arrived at our own white gate, the Cook was there to meet us. He could hardly wait to ask us questions.

We thought he was merely being polite.

"Dinner good, Memsahib?"

"Yes, thank you, Yusef."

We had reached the door, but Yusef was still beside us. He persisted.

"Memsahib like table?"

So, thought we, that was it. We began to understand why the table had been so familiar.

Yusef told us with pride that he, the expert, had been called over to the house of Arshad el Jamil in the afternoon. The Qaim Maqqam had been in a dither over the preparations for the dinner. Would Yusef, who knew our ways, arrange the table? And would he please supply from our household whatever was necessary in china and silver so that we might be entertained in the style to which we were accustomed?

But Yusef was not always willing to co-operate.

One evening some time later, as we sat before the fire in the middle room, playing Russian Bank, and awaiting the men's arrival for dinner, the door of the pantry opened and in came Motlog, the Second Boy. Instead of the salted almonds we expected him to bring in, he had in his hand a long fork. He was whimpering, almost crying. The fork was bent in the middle. We suspected that there had been dirty work. This time we were really frightened.

"Memsahib!" He had tears in his eyes.

"Yes, Motlog, what is it?"

"Memsahib—Cook—Cook—"

"Well, what did he do?"

Motlog went through the motions of stabbing himself. It

was obvious that Yusef had tried to stab Motlog with the fork that fortunately was not very strong. It had bent when it came in contact with Motlog's person. On investigation we found the Cook to be drunk, and we were obliged to order him from the premises until the next day.

But the next day, no Yusef appeared. Abbas fixed the breakfast and the lunch to the neglect of all his other duties. We gave the Cook one more day to recuperate.

We heard that he was not sobering up but was still on a spree. We worked ourselves up into a good rage and at five o'clock the next day the two of us marched over to the servants' quarters. We took the First Boy with us for protection.

Several women stood before the reed fencing that surrounded Yusef's door. One of them was Fatima, Yusef's wife.

"Fatima, call your husband!"

"Memsahib, he is ill with a fever!" was the answer.

"Fever or no fever, we command him to come out!"

"Oh, Memsahib, he will catch cold if he comes out into the air."

"He will catch more than a cold if he doesn't come out instantly!"

There was a consultation amongst the women. Fatima went inside, and we stood waiting, becoming angrier all the time.

Finally, wrapped in a big overcoat, the little Cook came out. He had a dirty rag wound around his head. It looked like a serious hangover. By now there was a respectful crowd round about. Our fate hung in the balance. We stepped up to Yusef.

"You will come to the kitchen to cook the dinner!" one of us said, while the other one, without more ado, slapped him hard in the face.

It was a bad moment. We turned quickly on our heels, with what we supposed was dignity, and marched back to the house. There was a grave silence behind us. A woman never

strikes a man. It simply isn't done. A man himself reserves that privilege to be used on a woman.

But when we reached the gate, we heard from Yusef.

"Yes, Memsahib, I come after ten minutes!"

But we never told Douglas that we had resorted to violence to keep his house in order.

XI

Housekeeping in Eden

THAT FIRST MONTH WE drank sixteen pounds of tea.

It takes, said Yusef, a lot of tea for four people. But we got to thinking about it in our spare moments until it got us down. So we sneaked a pound tin of Lipton's Yellow Label behind closed doors and measured it.

Over one hundred teaspoonfuls were in that tin. That should have fed quite a tea party. But it lasted us only two days.

This time the cats could not be blamed—they did not care for tea. Jassim's café must have served up some pretty good tea that month, and someone on our staff had made a little extra change.

Douglas liked order. He suggested gently that perhaps we did not give the proper supervision. After this, he advised, why not make detailed records of supplies and keep accounts of each day's messing? This, he said, was customary here in what one calls a mess. The expenses of a mess include all the food, servants' wages, or anything relating to the kitchen or household.

We saw ourselves juggling tins of sardines and stacks of figures—and never getting the right answer. We had visions of life's happiness dashed to the rocks by one miserable, missing jar of marmalade that couldn't be accounted for.

It took a long time and many experiments before we worked out a satisfactory system of mess accounts. We found that with the addition of a locked storeroom built in one end of the kitchen, it became easier to check up on things. The amount of tea we used monthly was miraculously decreased to two tins. And in time the consumption of other supplies became normal.

However, it was advisable, we discovered, to make certain allowances for the weakness of the staff in resisting special things, such as beer—especially during the time that Yusef was with us. We counted on the disappearance of six to ten bottles of beer a month, and when only two or three were missing, we knew that there was something wrong with Yusef.

Our days were full.

When we got up in the morning we took quick showers and dressed for breakfast with Douglas and Henri, who had already spent a few hours at the Plant taking advantage of the earliest part of the day. They usually came in hungry and already soaking wet with the heat. A breakfast of good strong coffee or tea, eggs, toast, jam, dates and whatever other fruit there was, revived them, and they went on out to their work again.

The first thing for us to do after breakfast was to visit the kitchen. There we inspected everything; we checked in the daily supplies brought by Daud the Shopper, and together with Yusef we wrestled with the menus. We met the no-lettuce situation (or thought we did) by ordering a lot of English vegetable seeds from Baghdad and starting a native



vegetable garden as well. We solved such problems as how to have chocolate soufflés with no chocolate within a couple of hundred miles, and how to keep food cold with no *Frigidaire*. To vary the menus we searched frantically through all the American cookbooks we had brought with us, but they always called for something that we couldn't get. Yeast, for instance, or brown sugar. Mrs. Beaton's English cookbook was even worse. Her imagination concerning ingredients staggered us.

However, if we had had whatever was missing for a new and tempting dish, we would only have got into worse trouble, for already there were enough international arguments at table. One Englishman, one Frenchman, and a couple of Americans can start a world war over a suet pudding. Or the combination of wheat cakes and bacon *with* maple syrup.

Most of our tinned and bottled goods came from England and the rest from America (coffee especially). It was necessary to order some time in advance through a supply store in Kut or Baghdad, and we were to find out that when the roads were cut, it frequently took weeks before the letter

reached the supply store and an order could be delivered to us. To speed things up a bit when we ran short, we got into the habit of wiring our lists of groceries to Kut or Baghdad. During the winter we were obliged to keep a supply in our store-room for at least a month in advance. .

After the kitchen duties were all taken care of, we would go outside to find out what the gardeners had done that was wrong, what had been stolen during the night, and what had been ruined by the wind and dust.

Then we attended to whatever else was most pressing.

By this time we had started work on the grounds around the house. Before we came, nothing had been done with the enclosed yard except for the planting of a small zinnia bed. But long before we arrived, eleven full-grown trees and four half-grown palms were already in our future garden. Apparently only God and Allah can make a tree in Iraq grow without a lot of trouble and watering. And even God and Allah do not seem to care for tree-growing, since, except for a patch across the river, there was not a tree to be seen for miles around, except the lovely ones beside our house which we planned to use as a basis for our garden.

We spent hours outside squinting and measuring, and we were still talking about it when we undressed at night. We drew out elaborate designs of straight and winding paths. Our idea was to plan so that if one looked down from the roof, the paths, besides being decorative, would make sense and really go somewhere.

Then we proceeded to carry out our design by first making the graveled walks. We asked Yusef for bowls of white flour which we spilled over the soil to mark both sides of the path. From the roof we could easily see whether the line or the curve was right and whether it fitted in with the garden design as a whole. The advantage of flour was that if we found

that the path looked wrong, we could erase the flour into the earth.

It was as if our ground was a canvas several acres square and we were laying out a huge painting on it with flour instead of charcoal.

Occasionally we had a setback. If we were not careful to mark the white line exactly, 'Brahim the Gardener achieved breath-taking results.

After the leveling, we laid large stones which the coolie gardeners fetched from the Plant as borders for the paths. Two tired donkeys worked all day long bringing gravel to spread on the surface of the walks, while three or four ragged, brown boys drove the tiny beasts, did the shouting, and gazed at us in much wonder. Sometimes they, too, carried gravel in their long dresses or in old sacks. For the carrying they were paid by the square meter, the gravel being measured in a wooden box.

Our serious struggles with the Arabic language now began.

"How many boxes did you bring yesterday?" we would ask in the morning, after we had learned by heart the phrase that Henri had taught us.

"Eleven!" the boldest boy would answer.

"Nine," we would correct.

"Ten!" he would shout. And then after a moment he would admit that it was only eight.

These boys found this play almost as entertaining as we did.

But we hardly supposed that they appreciated the beauty of the paths which they helped to make, paths that were so neat and gray and clean; nor did they feel the triumph and the pride we felt in viewing a path just completed.

The garden itself gave trouble.

It developed that no matter what kind of seeds we gave to 'Brahim to plant, onions always came up. Even on second

trial, though the packets brazenly read radishes or carrots, still everything turned out to be onions.

'Brahim seemed to be just as surprised as we were.

Then he said that it was the *jinn*s. But we suspected that perhaps 'Brahim did not care much for radishes or carrots or peas or corn. He preferred onions.

Then there was the problem of the irrigation canals or ditches.

They were to bring water to the garden from the pumps at the river. These irrigation canals caused a lot of hard feeling. Somehow they always got dug in a dizzy, drunken line instead of a nice straight one, so that they staggered all over the place and made our neat garden look ragged. 'Brahim thought that we were very, very odd, indeed, because first we wanted to have a canal dug in a straight line, and then we wanted trees planted irregularly so that they would look more natural!

He could not understand us.

'Brahim also thought that we changed our minds too many times about the piece of ground between the River Plant and the house.

To plow the whole section seemed a good start. That would clean it up a bit at least. But we could not decide whether to plant a field of barley there or whether to mark out paths and plant trees and put in a garden as we had first seen it in our imagination. 'Brahim was all in favor of growing vegetables. He wanted to show what he could do, and besides, vegetables would be very useful. (We had not had time yet to find out that he had an onion complex.) And anyone, said 'Brahim, could grow barley.

We decided on barley.

We had the ground leveled off. Then we hired an Arab who owned a tired white horse and a plow which he must have inherited from a Babylonian grandfather.

'Brahim warned us that parts of our land contained salt.

We extended the field to surround the house outside the fence. When the Arab plowed he did it in such a way that he left the edges of the field as wavy as a snake, though we stretched miles of white string on little sticks in the ground to guide him.

'Brahim warned us again. This time he said that we did not have enough water for such a field.

But the future velvet green of the barley urged us on.

'Brahim planted the seeds with graceful flourishes of his arm. It was very beautiful to see in the early morning.

But still he shook his head. There were many birds, he said, to eat the seeds.

We waited for our barley to come up out of the earth, but not a blade appeared at the appointed time. Up the road the clerk at the Plant had put in a tiny patch of barley. There the young green shoots were already two inches high like a thick and artificial grass.

Though we went out each day to watch for the first signs, our barley never came up. By then only a few little blades would have satisfied us.

We never found out whether it was the salt or the lack of water that spoiled our seeds, or whether the birds ate them—or whether someone who needed barley seeds more than we had been tempted to replace our good sacks of seeds with others not so good. No, it was surely the salt, we decided.

Later, however, flowers and vegetables flourished on the same ground and grew like weeds.

About this time we were also occupied with wiring our own room and bath with electricity. There had been no time to install it before we came. Five electricians were called in from Amarah, since those on the Plant could not be spared.

These five worked for four days walking in and out of the

room and spreading dirt and wires and implements all over the place.

Finally on the fifth day they gathered most of their tools together and said triumphantly:

"Finish!"

The results that they had brought about were very astonishing. When we turned the lights on, they went off; and when we turned them off, they went on.

And one light went right on burning all the time.

It took only two more days to set everything in order.

It was a good thing to get this job completed when we did, because soon afterward the wardrobes and the dressing table arrived.

The history of the wardrobes and the dressing table had been spread over a period of several years. It was in England that Douglas had heard us discuss the fact that we had never seen a really well-designed wardrobe, one that a woman would find convenient in every little detail. Wardrobes were usually not high enough for formal dresses or they did not have enough space for shoes. But why not, Douglas had suggested, design your own? In Iraq, for a few pounds, he said, one could build a lovely wardrobe in simple, waxed teakwood.

It was almost a challenge. We drew up a design of the Perfect Wardrobe and Dressing Table. (The wardrobe came out of our heads but the dressing table, as far as we could remember the details, was a copy of Katharine Hepburn's that we had had occasion to see many times.) When we had completed the designs they did not look big enough on the little sheets of paper. So several times we erased the measurements and added a foot here and a foot there until gradually the wardrobe and the dressing table grew very tall and very wide.

Then we sent the drawings on to Douglas.

A month before we arrived in Brooksville, Douglas suddenly remembered that he had never done anything about

these designs. He was in Baghdad at the time and he had only a few minutes to go to the carpenter's shop. The owner of the shop looked at the little pieces of paper, and then he asked if Douglas wanted them made exactly as they were indicated. Douglas said yes. Though the proportions *did* seem a little surprising, the drawings must be followed exactly, and, he added, by the way, better make it two wardrobes instead of one.

On his next visit to Baghdad he went to take a look at the furniture. When he arrived at the shop he was surprised to see that it had been enlarged.

The owner met Douglas sadly. He wrung his hands. He said that the shop had not been big enough to hold two wardrobes and a dressing table of such a size and so he had been forced to enlarge his shop.

It had cost a lot of money to do this, he said. The furniture would be very dear.

There stood the three enormous pieces. To reach the top shelf of the wardrobe to get your favorite blue hat, you would have to climb a ladder three or four feet high. But you had to admit that these pieces were very beautiful and simple in the teakwood, dull and unvarnished. Mirrors lined the inside of the doors of the wardrobe and the wings of the dressing table.

Even in his sadness the owner of the shop was very proud of his work.

But the pieces had to be taken apart again in order to get them *out* of the shop. Fortunately they had been built so that this was possible.

And then, since delivery in a truck over the roads to Brooksville would certainly have ruined the lovely wood and broken the pieces, it was necessary to ship them by boat down the Tigris.

When they arrived at our port of Brooksville it took the whole servant staff and five coolies from the Plant one half-

day to carry all the pieces off the boat and up the river bank and across the front yard to the house where they were laid to rest on the terrace until such a time as they could be set up by the carpenter's man who was to follow the furniture to Brooksville within a week or two.

It turned out to be Douglas himself who set up and put together one wardrobe and the dressing table. We grew tired waiting for the carpenter's man who never did appear, so Douglas spent the first enforced Mohammedan holiday sweating over the reconstruction of this furniture. He thought it was fun.

As for the second wardrobe, it was obliged to wait until the studio was built, and built *big* enough to hold such a gigantic and impressive piece of furniture.

These three pieces were the only grand things in the house.

As for the rest of the furnishing, we decided not to compete with the English colonists. We would have no tapestries and velvets. Even if we had tried we could never have reproduced an English suburban house anywhere—much less here on the desert.

Since we had need of only a few pieces of furniture to fill in, the best thing to do, we felt, was to pick up a table here and a chair there in the Baghdad bazaars when we made the journey. The rest of the pieces we designed and a local carpenter carried out our specifications in ordinary white wood. A few pieces were made entirely from the crates in which our supplies arrived from Baghdad. We ourselves stained the finished articles with a mixture of burnt umber and turpentine so that in the end they turned out to look like early American antiques if you stretched your imagination slightly.

One of the things we designed was a strange chaise longue, the back of which, by a very simple contrivance, slid up and down. We liked this so well with its chintz cushions that we ordered the carpenter to make two more like it.



Then we made use of the bazaars in Ali Gharbi. We discovered that there we had many choices of the cheap printed cottons (with small colonial patterns) made in Japan, which the Bedouin women wore so beautifully in the desert.

Daud the Shopper brought us samples and we bought bolts of the stuff which we hung at the windows. Some of these cheap cotton prints were so charming that while we were making the drapes we quickly ran up for ourselves a trailing dinner dress or two to match them.

After rearranging every room we began to be proud of the inside of our house with its rather primitive charm and pleasant color. Douglas's Persian rugs helped and we added a long black goat's-hair runner (the same material that the Bedouins' black tents are made of). We also used as rugs Ali Gharbi products of hand-woven, natural-colored blankets. From these, too, we had sports coats made during the following winter.

Our beds were terrible.

The national bed seems to be the well-known iron variety that sags with the greatest of ease. Sleeping arrangements for foreigners are complicated in such a hot country. For each person there always has to be two beds, one on the roof (in the summer) and one inside the house. We decided to put off

the problem of good beds until we found out more about shopping in Baghdad.

As for *objets d'arts*, we got them from the rafts that floated down the Tigris from Mosul. They carried for sale a selection of water jugs and blue enameled pottery. These simple things fitted well into our scheme. When we hailed the rafts they would draw up at our bank and we would buy the blue jars to use as salad bowls and as notes of color in our future garden. The gray, porous jugs, the color of *juss* and charming in shape, would be exactly right to place in the recessed windows of our dining room.

With all these jobs to attend to, our painting was neglected at first. But we were anxious to get the studio built so that when we had leisure we could begin to paint in earnest.

In the late afternoons when our work was done we went for walks on the banks of the Tigris, and then back to the house to choose the right dresses for dinner. Sometimes we decided on something trailing and imaginative to fit the evening; sometimes if there was a moon, we preferred a simple white; and at other times our vivid Bedouin-like prints seemed the perfect thing.

During the rest of the day we were so busy that we did not have time to think much about how we looked. But when night came—and dinner each night was an occasion—we took pains to make ourselves as presentable as possible.

We were encouraged in this by a very appreciative audience of two.

When we were dressed we would go out into the fresher evening air where we would sit and wait for Douglas and Henri to come in for cooling drinks before dinner. If they were very busy it would be nine or ten o'clock before we dined. Fortunately Yusef thought nothing of cheerfully and successfully holding over a six-course dinner for four on a two-burner kerosene stove.

We were getting our teeth into things.

We now had a staff of servants; our household was on its way to organization; the building and improvements were progressing; and the grounds and the garden were started.

The next thing to be done was to go up to Baghdad to buy the Frigidaire and to place the marriage bans.

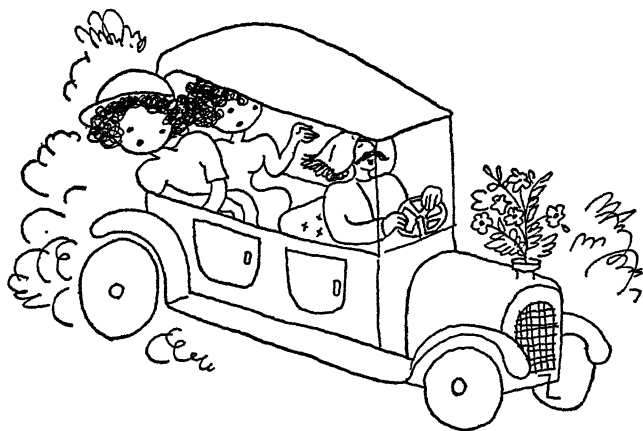
XII

Marriage Bans

SO, BECAUSE SOME ACCIDENT at the Plant kept Douglas in Brooksville, the two of us went up to Baghdad, driven by a native driver in his Model T Ford and with us went the Father of the Local Banker who had asked for a lift. (An ornament of artificial flowers decorated the radiator cap of the Ford.)

We knew enough by this time to make an early start, not merely to talk about it. We never wanted to experience again the agony of the trip down to Brooksville, so we took precautions this time: we dressed properly in long sleeves to protect our arms; we wore sun helmets; and we carried thermos bottles full of cold water. We knew now what to expect. We had become a bit acclimatized to the terrific heat in those few weeks in Iraq.

The roads were rough. We went over one bump after another in rapid succession which rattled the old car until we could hardly believe that the parts would stay together. At each of these shocks the accumulated dust shook itself loose from the floor boards and from the ancient upholstery. It rose in great clouds around our faces. The driver pulled his head-



dress up over his nose until only his eyes peeped out. We were not so fortunate. Then and there we determined to lose no time in adding these *cheffiyehs* to our wardrobe.

Some of the bumps were hidden in deep beds of dust, fine as sifted flour. When these were near a village it was necessary to make a wide detour or come to a full stop, not because we could not get through the dust but because there would be one or more donkeys lying asleep half-buried in the dust. If they were not asleep they would be rolling on their backs smothering out the flea life that so freely inhabited them. We could honk-honk as much as we pleased, but it takes a long time to rouse a donkey to action. Then the baby donkeys, staring at us with their ingenuous expressions, would trot off beside their mothers, wondering who had the audacity to disturb them.

But not all donkeys were so fortunate.

We passed some of them in caravans, heavily laden and urged on by women who carried short, stout sticks. With these they kept the poor beasts going, beating them on the two open sores on their hind quarters. The women tucked up their long, dusty, red and green dresses to make their own walking easier.

We left them in clouds of dust that almost hid them against the mouse-colored desert.

After an hour we came to a native bus, parked by the side of the road. The driver hailed us.

There followed a long conversation. Zeyd, the driver, and the Father of the Banker got out and talked in excited voices with the bus driver. Something was very wrong indeed. They drank from one another's water jugs which were made of canvas and hung on the side of the car. All three examined the back of the bus and one front tire. We decided from where we sat in the Ford that they had lost something. They had. It was a spare tire which had not been missed until they had a blow-out.

The bus passengers waited indifferently through all of this, sitting on the ground and making use of the shade cast by the bus. They were of all sexes and colors. They had been there for some time, we gathered. But they, too, had all the leisure in the universe. Mothers suckled their babies or sat doing nothing, their possessions spread around them.

When we finally started we had another passenger in our party. He hung on to the running board, his long striped gown streaming back as we drove. He was watching out for the tire. No one knew how far back it had been lost. At the same time that his eye searched for the tire, he carried on a running conversation with the driver and the Father of the Banker. They became so fascinated with what he was telling them that we nearly went into a ditch.

Our passenger rode with us almost as far as Kut before he gave up his search. Then we watched him start back on the lonely road afoot. The chances were that he would not meet another car to take him back, and we thought of the patient passengers who never questioned such an incident. What they did without the tire we never found out. With the help of Allah something probably turned up. It usually did.

After Kut, the broken springs on the seats of the car began to be increasingly annoying. Somehow, no matter what part of the seat we sat on, we always slid back on the broken springs. The ruts in the road had worn so deep in places that an attempt had been made by other travelers to start new tracks in the desert. We tried some of these and found a little relief, but by the time we reached Aziziyah we had had enough exercise to lame us for many days to come.

The motion of the car reminded us of the mechanical camels in ships' gymnasiums, except that the Ford was more violent. We were startled every few minutes with new motions and different sorts of bumps. We sent up a private prayer to Allah to let nothing interfere with Douglas's plans for the new, modern roads.

We had met no cars on the way up, but now, after leaving Aziziyah, we met something more formidable than travelers. It was a dust storm. We saw it coming in the distance, gray and yellow, sometimes swirling, sometimes stationary. When we were in the midst of it, the general effect was that of heavy smoke, blotting out everything on all sides.

The sand particles got into our eyes and down our throats and stung our hands. It was impossible to see a foot ahead. We were obliged either to stop dead, or to crawl along, honking for fear that we might crash into something ahead of us. Once or twice the suffocating clouds lifted or blew so furiously that they left empty spaces where we could race along for a few minutes, only to find ourselves in another fog again.

We were just beginning to think that we might spend the day here in the crazily-blowing dust, when gradually the clear spaces became more frequent, and as we neared Baghdad the only signs of the dust storm were the yellow air and the hazy look of things. This storm would have been considered a mere flurry by those who have been held up for several days by the complete invisibility which these storms sometimes cause.

The one thing that we wanted on the road was a cold drink. We had used up what we had brought with us in the thermos flasks, since we had shared it with the Father of the Banker. We had more water but it was about the temperature of hot tea, for it was stored in ordinary bottles. In Baghdad we would be able to choose between beer, fresh lemonade, and tonic water. We spent the last half hour of the journey wondering which would taste best, and forgetting for the moment that we had come all this way to begin the long procedure for the forthcoming marriage.

When we reached Baghdad we found that the American Consul was away on leave. The Vice-Consul was ill at the moment with a fever. But the officers in charge were very kind. The Vice-Consul even got out of bed to help us but after this act of gallantry could only tell us that, after all, we had come to the wrong place. American consuls have no official power to perform a marriage ceremony or to post bans. (Ours seems to be one of the few countries whose citizens cannot get matrimonial service from their consulates in a foreign country.)

So we went on to the British Consulate.

We were armed with passports and letters. Before starting for Iraq we had been in correspondence with the British Consulate in New York through the travel agency. It seemed that it was difficult for unmarried women to get permanent visas for Iraq (in the interests of morality).

At the British Consulate we found that their Consul was also away on leave. Someone else very kindly took care of us.

Apparently not many Englishmen were marrying Americans in Iraq, and we had complicated things by living in one *liwa* (district) and trying to get married in another. Between the Vice-Consul and the clerk they decided that it would be necessary first to place the bans in Baghdad (providing that

we could prove residence for a certain number of days in Brooksville). Then it would be necessary for one or both parties to go down to Basrah or to communicate with the British Consul there in order to put up the marriage bans in Basrah as well. We were told that after both sets of bans had been posted for a fortnight we could return to Baghdad any time during the following six weeks, notify the Consul, and the marriage ceremony would be performed.

Or if we liked we could choose another procedure which we have now forgotten but which involved either getting married in Basrah or moving to Baghdad, thus eliminating part of the form.

Neither of these two alternatives were guaranteed to work in the end anyway, unless our own papers were in order. We were given a notice copied out of a book which said:

"The Consulate is to warn the couple that the responsibility of whether their marriage is valid rests with them."

Filling in all the forms was simple until it came to a description of Douglas. Spinster classified the bride and we described Douglas as the former husband of . . .

But neither of us knew her first name. It had never occurred to us that the information would be required.

After a few minutes the Vice-Consul asked us if we would like to get in touch with Mr. Brooks.

We told him that he was in Brooksville.

"Perhaps you would like to use the telephone to call him?"

We did not have the heart to tell him that there was no telephone connection to Ali Gharbi or Brooksville, and that it was useless to send a telegram since it was Friday and on Fridays the telegraph office was closed in Ali Gharbi. It might be two days before an answer arrived.

So the bans were not put up.

We decided to go back to Brooksville and get Douglas to

send the necessary information to the Consulate. Then things would go ahead rapidly and only a few days would be lost.

We were only a little discouraged.

The Frigidaire had to be postponed, too. There was none to be had at the moment. However, a shipment was expected and we left our order. It would arrive soon in Baghdad and would be sent down by truck in the same crate in which it had been shipped from America. It would cause a bit of a stir at Jassim's café when it was unloaded and set up in our house.

We went into the shadowy ways of Baghdad to finish the rest of our shopping. The bazaars are a separate and strange world. There, under the shadows of the ages, one finds the necessities of life and the luxuries. In the narrow lanes the air is heavy with smells that are never washed away, though periodically during the day the streets are sprinkled. The hard dirt paths give out a dampness which would be vaguely depressing if it were not for the constant movement of the people up and down the lanes and the color of the merchandise in the booths. The complicated network of streets was confusing to us, and it became necessary to establish landmarks of a basket of knit slippers on a corner or a tray of sweets put down on the wet paths.

When we were lost we asked simply for Ali.

"Wen el Ali?" we asked the nearest Arab.

We had been told that these were magic words. Our advisers, a couple of British women, had said that Ali would help us in the bazaars. Since Ali is perhaps the most common Arab name (to be compared with our John), we had little hope of finding the Ali we sought, in spite of what the British women had said.

"Lady," answered the man to whom we had addressed the question, "I am Ali!"

And he was the right Ali, too, we found. We grew to be-

lieve that those words were magic, for in later trips to the bazaars we often asked for him. No matter in what crowded section of these *souks* we found ourselves, he never failed to appear from nowhere as if by virtue of Aladdin's lamp, to help us with our shopping (for a consideration) and to lead us out again when our purchases were made.

Our shopping list was very long: most of the items were pots and pans and household accessories. It was not so romantic to buy these things as it would have been to collect pearls and yellow amber, hand-woven silk *izaars* (cloaks) with gold threads in them, and incense. Instead, we wandered into a small furniture shop where we found deck chairs for the garden and hanging from the ceiling two white iron tables, which had been born in some French café.

A few low tables found in another corner were crudely made and painted blue with gay gold trimmings. They would do in the studio when it got built. We were amused to find that they were made to hold an old-fashioned sewing machine of the same size and model as ours. They elevated the machine to just the right height, since here one sits on the floor to sew.

It was three weeks later before we were able to do anything about the marriage bans.

Douglas did not write the letter to the British Consulate after all. He thought it would be better to go up to Baghdad again and attend to the matter personally.

The three of us made the trip on a very hot day. White clouds were beginning to show like feathers in the sky as an indication of a change in the hot weather.

We went to the Consulate the following morning only to find that the man to whom we had talked previously had been sent to Persia, and it seemed that no one remembered us. The whole thing had to be explained all over again.

A few weeks ago there had been a case something like ours, except that the bride had been Iraqi. The files concerning that case were consulted. We would be obliged, they told us again, to have the original divorce decree and two certified copies. These were absolutely necessary for the files of one or both Consulates before the marriage itself could be performed.

At the moment these papers were lying in a safe in a distant country, though Douglas had sent for them. We remembered all we had heard about the rains and the heavy floods of winter. Mail was held up and the roads were cut for weeks. Suppose the letters were held up several weeks in transit? Well, we would go back to Brooksville trusting to others to keep everything straight and to arrange the bans for Baghdad and Basrah.

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XIII

Bedouin's Breakfast

BY THIS TIME WE WERE well enough acquainted with the various kinds of dangers to go out quite freely by ourselves, sketching, riding, walking.

"You must not ride out alone in the desert," Simon told us.

"But no one will hurt us."

"These people are rascals," explained Simon. "You must believe me."

Allah only knows what sort of danger he was most afraid of: rape in a Moslem country is practically unknown; kidnapping is a yet undeveloped art; and though murder is not uncommon, still there must be a reason for it—such a reason as a ten-fils piece in your pocket. Since we never carried any money or wore anything but Woolworth jewelry we figured we were pretty safe. The only danger lay in the fact that many of these country people had never seen a European woman before. To them we would be strange-looking creatures in stranger clothes. And their curiosity might be annoying.

We laughed a little when Simon warned us. In New York, we told him, we might have reason to be frightened. But

here we enjoyed these jaunts because we could find things out for ourselves.

During the first few months we usually got up at six. Riding was not possible after nine o'clock because the temperature rose to one hundred and fifteen or twenty during the day. But by now the thermometer rose a little less sharply. It made everything more pleasant.

One morning we had breakfast with some Bedouins.

We had ridden toward the mountains. Usually we met up with only a camel or two, or some smuggling Persians on donkeys going up to their secret passes and looking as if they had worn the same dress ever since they appeared in the Persian miniatures. But on that morning we saw a Bedouin camp every few miles, and thousands and thousands of flat-tailed sheep. As we went on we came close to one small camp of only a dozen black goat's-hair tents. (The Bedouins call them "houses of hair.")

Two Bedouins, one very old and one very young, came out to watch us ride up. They hailed us and then offered us water and food. It would taste good, we thought, and besides to eat and drink with them insures protection.

"Salam alekum!"

"Wa alekum es salam!"

They invited us grandly and enthusiastically into their tents as if they were marble palaces.

Three young men tied the horses and inspected the saddles and stirrups. They were pleased that we used the local bridle, made of wool, to which these horses were accustomed. They shouted to the others to come look.

The men of the tribe and their Sheikh sat around us. They were long-skirted and barefooted, but not bareheaded. Seldom does a Bedouin go without his headdress—the large, fringed square like the small, checkered tablecloths in New York Italian restaurants. (They fold these corner-wise and



drape them on the head, either letting the ends hang, or crossing them under the chin and tucking them up under the black camel's-hair rope that is worn like a crown.) This arrangement hides the face somewhat and protects it from the sun and dust.

The Sheikh, wearing the usual beard, was dark and weatherbeaten. He was probably sixty, but handsome in spite of his rags. (It was a poor camp.)

"Will the Inglese honor my house by taking tea?" he asked in Arabic.

"*Mimnun*," we thanked him as we sat down.

"Jasim, my son," commanded the Sheikh, "bring tea to quench the thirst of the Inglese!"

He might have been a blue-stocking potentate by his manner to us, instead of a poor Sheikh of a small tribe. He had a great deal of dignity. It was his world. We, on the other hand, were feeling a bit undignified because of the fleas who lived in his beautiful Persian carpets, and whose diet had never before included American women.

Jasim came bringing the tea, and mumbling praises to Allah as if to make him responsible for the tea if it were not up to the mark.

It was served to us in small, tight-waisted glasses, made in Japan. Sugar had already been put into the tea, but Jasim bent and picked up two twigs. He carefully wiped them on the edge of his tattered skirt, and handed them to us. They were spoons.

We finished the tea.

"Jasim, my son, bring *laban* for the Inglesel!"

So Jasim brought *laban* (a kind of clabber milk) in great bowls. It is a cooling and thirst-quenching dish, full of nourishment, comparable to buttermilk. It was often the only thing a Bedouin got to eat in a day, so we drank very little from our bowls because it might have been precious to them.

"May we sketch a bit?" we asked the Sheikh.

"Have you any cigarettes?" he answered.

We understood that it was to be a trade. But we had no cigarettes with us. We promised to bring some the next day, and on that basis we made the bargain.

With the notebooks and pencils which we always carried with us, we drew little sketches of some of the men sitting around us. These country people never seemed to mind being sketched. Apparently they had never heard of Mohammed's prohibition against drawing the human figure.

The women watched from a short distance. They giggled coyly but seemed as pleased as some Americans under the fire of a candid camera. When we looked up at them, some of them covered their tattooed faces with a jerk of their *abbas*. They were a colorful lot in reds and indigos, oranges and browns. The babies that some of them carried had eyes covered with flies.

Some of the women went on working. One stooped over a fire on the ground, cooking something in a pot. Another sat quietly rocking a crude little hammock in which lay a tiny baby bundled tightly in rags. Two others were making butter

by swinging to and fro a goatskin full of sloshing milk hung from a tripod.

A tall woman milked sheep and another separated lambs from their mothers.

There was a *saluki* dog tied up and blanketed near where the old Sheikh sat. Every Bedouin camp owns one or two of these aristocrats of dogs, which are really Persian greyhounds. They are much treasured by the Bedouins because they are hunting dogs, swift as gazelles, and graceful as birds. They always wear a blanket, secured with a string or a safety pin. (A child may go shivering in the winter on the desert, but a *saluki* always has a coat.)

The old Sheikh offered us a place to sleep and rest. Hospitality is a general virtue amongst these nomads. It is born of the necessity to give and to get help in the face of the great odds against which their fathers, from the beginning of time, have fought for their existence.

But we thanked the Sheikh and then said our good-bys.

"Fi aman Allah!"

"Tomorrow," promised the Sheikh, "we will come to *your* tent, *in sha Allah!*"

It tickled us to imagine the jolt that Abbas would get if the Sheikh really came ringing our doorbell with his tribe and his sheep and his fleas trailing behind him.

The next day when we set out to deliver the promised cigarettes to the Bedouins, we found nothing on the site of their camp but clean desert and a few gray remains of their fires. So we turned around and galloped back to Brooksville to start the painting of Abbas' brother who was to pose for us that morning. Abbas' brother proved to be a good model. Though there was a glass of tea before him on the table he did not so much as take a swallow of it, and thereby disturb his pose. He must have got his practice sitting

in coffeehouses in Baghdad where he had come from. He would have been surprised to know that his handsome face would hang in a Fifty-seventh Street gallery two years later.

Abbas' brother was tall and dark-skinned with the characteristic aquiline nose. He wore a brown *abba*, trimmed at the neck with gold metallic embroidery, and under the *abba* showed a dullish pink gown. The headdress was of a smoky blue color.

These Arab robes were so huge and full that if a model moved after you started to draw the drapery, you had to begin all over again. We had trouble with most of the country people in the hot weather. They found it hard to sit indoors for us. Some of them groaned and carried on and acted as if they were about to die. They became so fidgety that we were forced to let them go. More often we painted out-of-doors and caught our models in some natural activity. The gypsies who passed made the best models when they came to sing and play and dance for us.

One morning when we rode out, we were offered a baby.

A gaily-dressed group of women had come by. They drove a string of loaded donkeys, and when we drew up our horses, they stopped too. Presently they came over to us, laughing and talking amongst themselves. They persuaded one old hag to dance for us while their applause and singing accompanied her efforts. She was almost lewd in her ugliness. Her hanging breasts and dyed red hair and wrinkled skin contrasted suggestively with the dance she did. But they all thought it was very funny. We had to laugh with them.

It was then that they got the idea of offering us the baby that one of them carried. It had nothing on but a short indigo-blue dress and a little cap. It was an offspring of a coolie who had worked for us and whom we were obliged to discharge when the marks of syphilis became too noticeable.



As we watched the baby and its mother and her companions go on their way we remembered that we had read somewhere that a large percentage of the population was afflicted with this disease. However, it is supposed to lie dormant most of the time. It seemed to us that the victims we had seen had not been overwhelmed at their misfortune. Illness is accepted as sent from Allah. What is written is written. This fatalistic attitude saves these people from a lot of useless grief and sorrow, but on the other hand it is also discouraging to the progress of modern medical effort.

There is much prejudice against doctors. For the cure of sickness, magical methods are in much higher standing. Such remedies as an especially brewed sparrow or a charmed egg or a sacred stone are supposed to be very effective. There was a case of a young girl in a village nearby. She had always been ailing. First it was one thing and then it was another until the girl was fourteen and about to be married to her cousin. Her wedding day arrived. But on that day the girl developed such a fever that she was obliged to stay in bed. Her family was upset. And so was the bridegroom. It seemed that the girl would die, but an uncle arrived in the nick of

time and saved her life. He sent two men relatives from the house to tie a thin thread across the road. It was left there until the first passer-by, a stranger on a donkey, came along. He broke the unseen string. The girl at once commenced to improve and in six or seven hours was completely well. The strange man undoubtedly got the fever, as it was planned that he should (though no one followed him to verify this). The wedding celebration went on and everyone was happy.

By this time we were almost believing in *jinn*s, the strange unearthly creatures we heard so much about. There are so many varieties of them that you never know what to expect—they are good or bad, gay or sad, evil or kind. Some of them cause ailments. Some of them are mischievous and cast spells on you. Sometimes a *jinn* even falls in love and lures a young girl into bad ways. He comes to her at night with irresistible charms. She knows that her *jinn* lover has been with her by the signs in the morning—a dent on the pillow, or a present left for her in the form of a coin. There is the story of the young virgin who was seen by her mother coming into the house early in the morning. The mother demanded an explanation. The girl was much upset, and said that the *jinn* had come to her and persuaded her to spend some hours with him. She said that she was helpless to resist following him. The mother thought that she remembered hearing her daughter cry out in the night, and so, to guard the girl from further adventures of this kind, the mother slept from then on in the same bed with her daughter.

The female *jinn*s, called *jinniya*, are very bold, even bolder than the *jinn*s. A *jinniya* will come at night to please or bother her human lover even if his own wife sleeps in his bed. These *jinniya* are supposed to be unusually beautiful and sometimes they have all the grace and loveliness that a tired wife may lack. They may even make love to a man and leave

him without waking him. No wonder that human wives are jealous of these unearthly loves.

But a really bad *jinn* may enter into you and cause you all manner of suffering. He may make you foam at the mouth in pain or go into fits. The remedies for expelling him are many and varied, but until the right one is found, sometimes only after long experiment, the *jinn* will stay put.

The Evil Eye is, of course, very much feared. This may cast a spell on you for many reasons: jealousy, greed, wickedness, or just plain cussedness. If, when you were a child, you were dressed too well, or kept too clean, the Evil Eye might have been attracted to you. Or if your mother neglected to sew somewhere on your clothes the little stone button of blue, made and sold especially for the purpose, then the Evil Eye could get at you and do you harm. To prevent it from noticing a child, it is thought wise to keep him a little ragged and dirty so that he is not conspicuous.

In the case of a boy child, it is safer to disguise him, since boys are more important and precious than girls and therefore more likely to be noticed by the Evil Eye. In the same village as the girl who had the fever, there was a servant in the household whose little boy was always dressed as a girl so that if the Evil Eye happened to catch sight of him, it would think the child a girl and so not bother about it.

The fear of the Evil Eye, however, is as nothing compared with a woman's dread of barrenness. A woman may be divorced, disgraced, pitied, or beaten for this failure to bring children, and especially sons, to her husband. For barren women there are consequently countless charms and magic remedies for changing her state. But on the other hand there are none to prevent childbearing, because every woman wants as many children as possible.

A barren woman may go to a certain well outside Baghdad where she gives a few coins to the holy man who watches

there. He will then allow her to draw three bucketsful of water, which she tips over her shoulder, saying at the same time, "*Tahabbel*." This means "Be fruitful" and, said under these circumstances, is supposed to be extremely effective.

A childless woman may be sure to have her wish fulfilled if she goes to the cannon that stands at the gate of the Citadel in Baghdad and there offers a little bunch of old rags to be hung on the cannon. This cannon is over three hundred years old and is called *Abu Khezama* (Father of a Nose Ring).

Some people say that a sure way to change a barren woman's luck is to crawl between the legs of a camel.

As for remedies for the Restoration of Youth, we came to the conclusion that they are not very effective, for the demand by the Arabs for foreign medicines which will restore vigor to an old man is very common. There is a general idea that the English possess this secret. An Englishman who lived in the South told us that in his many dealings and friendships with the sheikhs in that country he had been asked countless times for such a remedy. The applicants never quite believed that the Englishman was sincere in his answer that he knew of no such medicine.

A woman in Baghdad told us of a British Political Officer in the post-war period who knew an old Sheikh who was very troubled because he could no longer make his wives happy. He had taken a new wife whose youth in itself he thought would help him. She was very beautiful and she was only fourteen years old.

The Sheikh came to the Political Officer one day.

"Allah be praised, you are my very good friend!" he said.

"What can I do for you, then?" asked the Political Officer.

"My friend," said the old Sheikh, "will you please get for me a bottle of your medicine that will restore to me the power to make my young wife happy?"

"I am very sorry," said the Britisher, "but I have no such medicine and I do not know where to get it."

But the old Sheikh believed that the Political Officer was merely reluctant to do this for him. So he came another day and asked for the same thing. His visits became a little boring to the Britisher until finally one day while the Sheikh was calling, a box of supplies arrived from England. A servant came in to unpack it. In the box, amongst many other things, were several jars of honey. The Political Officer on the spur of the moment told the Sheikh that at last the medicine had arrived.

He gave one of the jars of honey to the old man and told him that it would prove very effective. The Sheikh was overjoyed and thanked the Officer many times, promising him a fine gift in return for this kindness.

During the next few days the Political Officer was very busy and had no time to regret the trick he had played on the old Sheikh. But the third day a Bedouin from that Sheikh's tribe rode in with a handsome mare which he said was a present sent by the Sheikh to the Officer. The latter refused to accept the mare and sent it back.

About a month later the old Sheikh came riding up and much to the Officer's surprise he cried:

"May Allah prolong your life and bring you happiness!"

He explained that the remedy had been so successful that he had come for another jar; his young wife was already pregnant, and he hoped for yet another son!

XIV

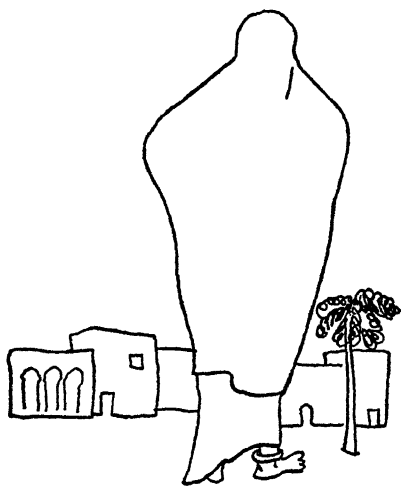
Simon's Stories

SOMETIMES SIMON CAME by on an errand or stopped in to ask us what we would like to have him bring back from his next trip to Amarah. Often we asked for fruit, since Ali Gharbi had so little variety.

Simon could never understand how we could use up such a quantity of lemons. When he thought we had asked for too many, he would cut down the number to be on the safe side. If he had an idea that our bills for the supplies in Ali Gharbi were too high for the month (since they went through his hands), he would write us a little note to suggest that we use fewer roasts or less lamb in order to cut down expenses. Since our table was one of our only recreations, we allowed ourselves some leeway here; but we were amused and touched at Simon's desire to help.

Occasionally Simon accepted a cold lemon squash or a cup of tea. And then he might tell us a story or some local scandal or gossip. We came to look forward to these times because we had no outside entertainment.

One day when we sat with Simon in the garden waiting for



Abbas to bring the iced drinks, we could see that Simon had something to tell us.

He lowered his voice.

"There was a robbery last night in Sheikh Saad!" he announced.

Now a robbery sometimes involved a murder, so we were all attention and eager to hear about it. But just at that moment, around the corner came the lemon squash and Abbas with his too-open ears. The story waited while Abbas fussed around and Simon filled his glass with sugar and stirred it all up. Finally when Abbas had gone, Simon went on with his story.

He told us that next door to him there lived a woman named Zenobia. She had a husband and three children. They were well off, for the man owned several flocks of sheep and a piece of ground just outside the village, on which he grew barley. Their home was a tumbling two-story affair built of mud, on the bank of the river. We remembered that we had seen it several times.

Zenobia herself was ragged in her brilliant garb, but with all this shabbiness Zenobia wore fine jewelry. She wore earrings and bracelets and two nose rings. At the end of her hennaed braids hung silver bells and there were fine rings on at least four fingers of each hand.

But her most precious possession was a pair of heavy silver anklets studded with blue stones which shone as they encircled her brown dusty ankles. When Zenobia walked down the path to the river she was always conscious of these fine, handsome ornaments. In case she forgot for an instant, she would be reminded of their existence by the tiny silver chains attached to the clasps that went clink-clink as she walked.

The one fear of Zenobia's life was that some *jinn* would mischievously spirit away her precious anklets. She also feared that the Evil Eye would cast a spell on her to punish her for her pride in these possessions, so she took care that she sewed plenty of the little blue stone buttons on her clothes.

Zenobia's husband had been absent for a few days, taking his sheep to the sheep dip provided by the Government for the improvement of the wool. Zenobia herself encouraged him to go. She assured him that she would take excellent care of herself during his absence.

But when the husband came home from his journey, Zenobia came running to meet him at the door. She was weeping and wailing. She tore her hair. She went into hysterics. She rolled on the floor.

When her husband had calmed her, she cried out the dreadful news: her anklets had been stolen!

"By Allah!" exclaimed her husband, "we will catch that thief!"

"*In sha Allah!*" Zenobia wailed. Her husband stood watching her.

"But, woman," he said suddenly, "you never take off your anklets!"

He took her by the shoulders and cried, "I will beat you for this loss!"

And he threw her on the floor.

Zenobia, sobbing, told him that she had slept as usual on the roof terrace, in her large bed with the three children and that while she slept a thief must have come and unfastened her anklets, for she awakened just in time to see a man climb over the wall and disappear. She had cried out. Then suddenly feeling her ankles bare, she cried again, and jumped from her bed. But the robber, she said, had called up to her to stay quiet or he would shoot. So she had kept still and waited for her husband to come.

Zenobia's husband called the police. But with all their efforts they could locate nothing but a footprint at the base of the wall, which looked as if someone had stepped down heavily from a good height.

There was a great stir in the village. Zenobia's friends and neighbors came in to weep and wail with her (though some of these women must have secretly rejoiced at Zenobia's loss). Several friends reminded her that "what is written is written."

"But don't you know who might have done this robbery?" we asked Simon.

With a little coaxing Simon told us Zenobia's secret. She had a lover.

"But what has that to do with the robbery—exactly?" we asked Simon.

Then he told us that Zenobia's lover had come to him right after the robbery for advice and help. The lover asked Simon to hide Zenobia's anklets, but Simon refused to be involved in the affair. Later in the day Zenobia also came to him for advice, but Simon refused for the same reason. But Simon learned from her what had really happened that night.

Zenobia said that her lover had spent a few hours with her

each night of her husband's absence. The children slept soundly. But early that morning, just as it was getting light, Zenobia heard the sheep being driven into the gates of the courtyard. She had not expected her husband so early.

She was terrified. How would her lover escape?

Since a woman's punishment for infidelity is sometimes death itself, she was in a panic. Zenobia was not ready to die. Life was far too good at this moment to allow oneself to be thrust cruelly into the next.

But what to do?

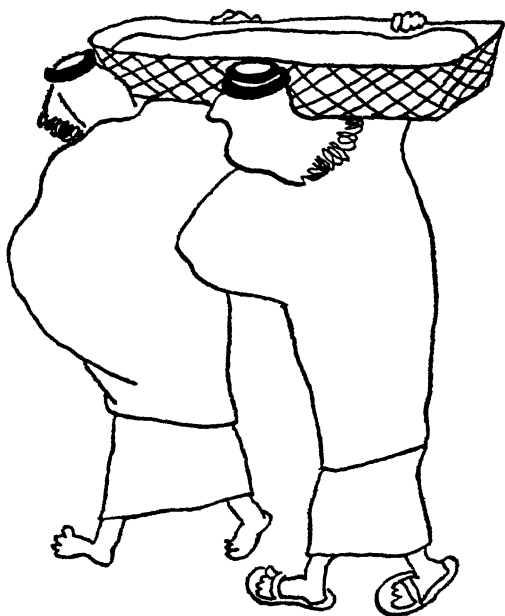
She must have a perfect explanation in case her husband saw her lover climb down the wall. She thought quickly, gathering all her wits together. Inspiration came. She hurriedly and fumblingly unfastened her anklets, gave them to her lover, and told him to fly as fast as he could but to keep her anklets as a souvenir of her love and affection until such a time when she would give him a sign to return them. She watched him as he escaped down the wall, and she congratulated herself on her cleverness.

It was months later that Simon told us the sequel of that supposed robbery.

"Well, Zenobia was right," said Simon. "It *was* a robbery!"

And he went on to tell us that with enforced separation Zenobia's lover had become cold and he had moved on to Basrah. Since without risk Zenobia could not give him a sign, he had not returned the anklets to her. Afraid for her life, Zenobia was powerless to act even as time went on. Finally a report came from Basrah that Zenobia's anklets had been seen adorning the slim ankles of another woman who had leisure for mischief, since her husband was the possessor of three other wives all younger than herself.

Once in a while we visited Simon's little house in Sheikh Saad.



On these occasions we sat drinking tea with Simon on his rooftop, while the sun went down and the moon came up. The tops of the date palms surrounded the roof, waving lazily in the night air. Simon's servant would come up now and then bringing more sweets and nuts and fruit.

Donkeys, camels, and sheep drank below us at the river's edge. The cries of their masters came up to us, mingled with the gossiping of the passing villagers. We could hear, too, the regular beat of Simon's gasoline pump a mile or so away, which pumped the good Tigris waters into his fields of barley to make them grow green and velvety. All the noises of getting-ready-for-the-night mixed themselves together and reached us on the peaceful rooftop.

We talked about the burial customs of the Moslems.

There are two chief sacred cities in Iraq: Kerbala and Nejaf.

They are next to Mecca in holiness. It is the aim of every *Shiah* (a Moslem sect) to be buried in either of these two cities, because those who lie there are assured of Paradise.

Very often we saw corpses in transport, bound for the holy cities. They were taken either by horse, donkey, car, or camel. They may have been fresh, or two or twenty years dead, according to the financial state of the family.

From our part of the country it would take a horse or a camel or a donkey many days to reach Kerbala or Nejaf, but a car could do it in a few days by going to Baghdad and then down. So the cost of transporting corpses varies with the method used, and the distance from which the corpse comes.

There are men who make a business of transporting bodies to their final resting places. Sometimes these journeys can be made shorter by going part way by river. In that case it is necessary to declare the bodies and to pay a special rate fixed by the River Transport Company.

We were impressed by the weird story about the last journey of two corpses, told to us by Simon. We thought it rivaled that of Mark Twain's concerning the corpse in the baggage car.

One day a friend of Simon's, who was agent for the River Transport Company, was advised to board a certain boat to investigate the reported smuggling of corpses. The result of the investigation was that a culprit was discovered and punished.

The crime had been a particularly gruesome one and shocked everyone who heard it.

The guilty man had come from Qurnah. He had contracted to deliver and see to the burial of two bodies in Nejaf. For this he had accepted payment from the families of the deceased. This sum involved enough to cover the boat fares for himself and corpses, and a nice profit for his labor. The families of the dead had at last been able to save enough to man-

age these burials, and their beloved ones were now on their way to rest in peace.

The corpses were some years old. Their custodian schemed that if he could manage to save the boat fare of his two companions, he could double his profits. He thought and thought and finally a perfect plan came to him. He ground up the bones of the two skeletons, and being very careful not to mix them up, poured them into two sacks which he mentally labeled "Barley Flour." And as such he declared them when he boarded the boat. He slept the night peacefully, and even lent these sacks to some Hebrew women nearby on the deck, so that they could rest their heads during the hard hours of the early morning.

But as secrets are not always secrets in the East, some enemy of the man from Qurnah had whispered the tale to the officials of the River Transport Company. When the man was exposed, the contents of the sacks were examined, and the charges found to be true. There was great excitement on the boat. The women who had used the sacks as pillows shrieked and wailed and went into hysterics. The culprit was taken by the authorities and put into prison. What happened to the "barley," no one thought to ask.

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XV

The "S.S. Mal de Mer"

THE RAINS BEGAN IN November. With the rains came cooler weather, roads like marmalade, and later, floods.

During this season we went to Basrah for a few days. Although Basrah was only six hours' drive away, at the head of the Persian Gulf, it took us two days and two nights to reach it by boat. The road was not open because of the rains.

We wanted to hail a passing steamer, but no one knew when one would come or indeed if it would stop at all because of the racing current. Innumerable telegrams went back and forth inquiring when a boat would leave Baghdad and arrive in Kut, and subsequently Brooksville.

To send a telegram was not always easy. First it had to be taken by one of the servants to the village of Ali Gharbi. This meant a walk of five miles up the river and a wait for the next canoe-like ferry to go across the Tigris. Sometimes there was a delay at the Post Office because no one read English there. If Simon happened to be in Ali Gharbi then all would go well, and what he did for the Post Office was from the kindness of his heart and not in an official capacity. It was

pure chance if telegrams delivered by Daud the Shopper were readable, and sometimes they were days late for other reasons than the Cook's forgetfulness.

After waiting several days for a boat, a telegram arrived announcing that the *S.S. Medjidia* would come during the night. So we sat up expecting to board her. Finally when her lights appeared in the distance, we were ready, but to our surprise she went by at a great speed. We were puzzled until a day later, when we received a delayed telegram telling us that there was no available cabin on her.

A few days later, the *S.S. Miramar* (we called her the *S.S. Mal de Mer*) pulled up at our front door, and we boarded her in greater excitement than if we had been taking a transatlantic liner at a midnight sailing. We had been waiting for five days, packed and ready, with the baggage lined up on the terrace, prepared to go at a moment's notice. Yusef was tired out fixing a fresh basket of food daily.

Since the steamer's stop was to be a short one, we had drilled the staff as to what each one was to carry to the boat, and how to get it there quickly. At the last and exciting moment of departure, the Latrine Boy made the staggering *faux pas* of grabbing the comparatively clean-looking food basket instead of the deck chairs that we had so carefully planned that he should carry. There could have been no greater disgrace for us in the eyes of the mob that had gathered from nowhere to see us off.

We snatched up the two kittens we were taking to friends in Basrah and, amidst the shouting of everyone concerned, topped by the shrieks of the cats, we were off.

As the boat started, we found that our culinary preparations had been made in vain, for there was an excellent Indian cook on board, and we were invited to sit at the Captain's table. (There was only one table.)

During this voyage we discovered what the Well-Dressed

Passenger Wears on the Tigris. A few elegant merchants (who would have told you that they were Europeanized) traveled with us First Class. They wore costumes consisting of striped silk bed-pajamas under dressing gowns of brocaded gold damask (with as much gold as possible). Most of the day, however, they left off the dressing gowns.

The deck above us (like Special Tourist and Third Class) was crowded to overflowing with men, women, and children. They were most ingenious with their tents and kitchens. They cooked three times a day over charcoal fires and carried, for their principal foodstuff, dried rotten fish. These tempting morsels waved gaily from the ceiling above them, where their owners had tied them with bits of rags.

The scenery of the first day was not very interesting.

At any given spot there was the same view—flat, unbroken country and a great deal of blue sky. The Tigris was high and almost on a level with the surrounding desert. We sat in our deck chairs. There was no other place to sit except in the stuffy little dining cabin. There was only one sleeping cabin available and that was a single. Now we are not fussy people and could have slept almost anywhere. Once years ago we had gone “deck” from Greece to Constantinople with some other students, and another time we had gone halfway up the Danube on a very slow boat, with similar accommodations. But here on the Tigris it seemed to the Captain that it was unthinkable for one of us to sleep in her deck chair.

Soon word came that an army cot had been found. We were in luck. However, it was not to be put into our cabin until we were completely ready to retire, because once the cot was inside there would be no room for us to stand except *on* the beds. When we gave the sign that we were ready, we came out into the dining cabin, and with some maneuvering, the cot was installed. Then we could just slide through the door that opened only a foot inward.

The two cats thought it was a great adventure and a joke. They crawled and leaped and jumped across our stomachs, and then they discovered a window we had been unable to shut. We grabbed one of them by the tail just as it was disappearing into the void. Something had to be done, so we put their leashes on them and tied the ends of the straps to our wrists. We got through the night somehow.

There was one First Class W.C. on board the *Mal de Mer*. The other classes, as far as we could discover, must have carried their own. In the same compartment with the W.C. there was a bathtub. It was not inviting.

After being tied up to the shore for the night (navigation was too tricky in the dark) we reached the town of Amarah where, during the following year, we were to come often to see the Mutasarrif. It was in Amarah too that we were to meet for the first time the young King Ghazi. But that is another story.

When we left Amarah we sat again in our deck chairs until we were called for breakfast, which turned out to be quite a feast. The Captain, a weather-beaten Englishman, made a point of having as good a table as possible under the circumstances. He had gathered, at various places on the way down, a variety of fruits. There were oranges, pomegranates, dates, grapes, bananas, and coconuts. Then came porridge and kipper and bacon and eggs.

We never saw the other passengers at mealtime. Those in the First Class had their own food prepared for them between our meals.

After breakfast a young Iraqi, who boarded the boat at Amarah, came to talk to us. He spoke fairly good English, for he had a job as clerk in a shipping company in Amarah. In half an hour he left and went back to his friends on the deck above. We could hear them talking. It was about an hour later that he appeared again beside us.

"Madam," he said politely, "have you some brandy with you?"

Then he explained that one of the young girls on the deck above was very ill with severe pains in her stomach and lay writhing in agony. The young Iraqi held a cup in his hand. He had no doubt that all "English" traveled with an emergency supply of brandy.

We did have some brandy with us, but for an entirely different purpose. We were taking to our host in Basrah a bottle of very fine old Armagnac which we had been saving for him for a long time. It took us about two seconds to ponder the merits of the occasion. We were not quite sure from previous experience that things were not grossly exaggerated. But we delved down into the depths of our bags and brought out the bottle.

Since *any* brandy is just "brandy" to these people, we sighed as we poured out the lovely, clear liquid.

The young man thanked us profusely, and we did not have the heart to verify his story. But later in our own household in Brooksville we had similar experiences. There were requests for "brandy" by everyone, from the father of the Latrine Boy to the Butler's uncle.

"Memsahib, my child is sick, and will die."

"Please, Memsahib, brandy for my wife. It is a stomach-ache!"

"I have a pain here . . . please, a little brandy!"

At first, though we were aware that the Moslems are forbidden to drink alcohol, we were inclined to grant these requests without too much investigation, but when things got a bit out-of-hand, we asked Henri for his suggestions. It was his advice to dole out small bottles of castor oil; and from then on, the rapidity with which illnesses disappeared was positively astounding.



After Amarah the scenery changed.

We were coming into the Marsh Arab Country. There was now the fascinating uncertainty whether or not the boat would get through the narrow channels and around the sharp curves. Suddenly there would come a lurch, which meant we had come to a turn and had bumped against one or both banks. Then there would be shouting and backing up and trying again. Then more bumping, with what seemed to us great abandon. The Marsh Arabs on the shore sprang from behind tall reeds and joined in the hilarity. Some of these

curious water people swam out and around us, as much at home in the water as on land.

The Marsh Arab is a very different creature from the desert Arab. He occupies the extensive swamplands that spread between the two rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, in lower Iraq. It is interesting to compare him with the earliest settlers of the Marshes at Al Ubaid (which is near Ur) at the time, when the coastline was gradually changing in the Persian Gulf district, due to the silt brought down by these two rivers. The original settlers came to get away from the droughts of the deserts. They built their reed huts on the flooded islands formed by the deposits of the rivers, and the remains of these huts, unearthed by Sir Leonard Woolley, are exactly the same in construction as the huts of the present Marsh Arab. They are built of arched reeds, on which are applied reed mats and plaster.

Remains of similar settlements, found under the cemeteries of Ur, show signs of a tremendous flood, thought by some excavators to have been the Flood of the Bible.

Other relics of primitive cultures in the excavations of Al Ubaid are boats and pottery. The likeness of the pottery to that of the Iranian Highlands has given to historians a significant clue as to the beginnings of the Sumerians. The boats were the same as the *mash-hufs* used today in the Marshes: primitive canoes made watertight by means of bitumen.

These high-prowed *mash-hufs* glide noiselessly through the narrow water paths and intricate lagoons of the Marsh Country. They have played an important part in the tales told of the Marsh Arab and his feuds, wars, and romances. They are the only means of transportation in the country.

We looked carefully at some of the passing villages. Many others lie deeper in the marshes because these people prefer to be hidden from sight. The little islands on which the riverside villages are built, looked as if the slightest misstep might

tip and swamp them. Cows, water buffalo, sheep, chickens, geese, dogs, and a few horses stood so crowded that they were forced inside the reed houses of their owners. These islands were saved from being flooded by little mud dykes a few inches high. The water almost overlapped the dykes since the islands were as low, if not lower, than the surrounding high-water level. Everyone in the Marsh Country lives a life of wet feet.

Little Johnny Marsh Arab would never understand the familiar (to us) warning, "Don't get your feet wet!" But there is no fear of pneumonia. The Marsh Arab goes right on cutting reeds and growing rice. The former are used all over Iraq for building, fuel, and weaving, while the latter is an important export and one of the chief foods.

We heard mention of the Tigris Lorelei.

She is called by another name but she is just as dangerous. She lures unsuspecting, home-loving males by singing to them and combing her seaweed hair. She will drag you down if you are not careful, down to the mysterious river bottom where she will do her best as a siren, for she knows that children of such unions are certain to possess magic powers to heal sickness.

It is said that an old Turkish law holds that a marriage between a mermaid and a human being is illegal!

We arrived in Basrah about six the next morning.

Our host, an English Judge, was there at the dock to meet us. He had brought with him his servant Kerim: chauffeur, valet, and housekeeper all in one.

The efficient Kerim disembarked our luggage, and arranged to send back on the same boat our deck chairs that were to be dropped at Brooksville. Then Kerim picked up the two surprised kittens and drove us all to our host's house.

Although Basrah is the City of Dates to most people, to us it spelled the Bright Lights after our isolation. We were gay.

We went to parties and we danced and we dined and picnicked. Besides all this we delivered the two kittens to their future home and went sketching among the date palms and the South Sea-looking native villages.

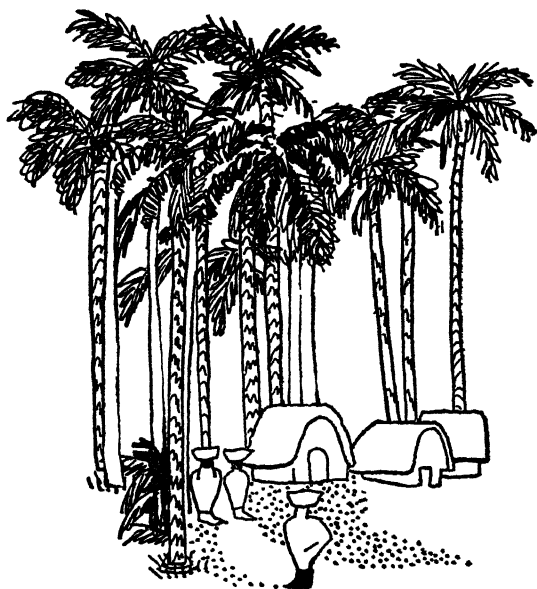
Basrah is the greatest date port in the world. About eighty percent of the world's dates are grown in Iraq and are shipped out from Basrah to points all over the globe. The dates in your plum pudding or in your annual fruit cake are likely to have been grown on a tree in Iraq. There are miles of palms everywhere. If you are on a high rooftop in Basrah, a cloud of green spreads out as far as you can see. If you are on the ground, the straight rough trunks of the palms seem to rise to unbelievable heights.

Basrah is a kind of modern Venice with its canals and boat traffic. It was also the city of Sinbad and the port where he lived between voyages. Even now this city has a fairy tale appearance and a luxuriant dirtiness that belongs to the Arabian Nights era.

We found time to spend in the bazaars, too. They were more crowded and less organized than the Baghdad bazaars. They contained everything that we wanted and more. We did not buy camels and their keepers, amber beads, crystals, copper pots, or any such romantic things. But we did check off our lists such items as safety pins, buttons, yard goods, glassware, china, needles and cutlery, all from Japan. Basrah was full to overflowing with things marked "Made in Sheffield Japan" or "Made in Manchester Japan" (with the word Japan in the smallest of letters).

Before we had been in the bazaars five minutes, and had only acquired a few safety pins, we were suddenly aware of a noisy mob of people following us. There were troops of boys with baskets.

"Khatun, Khatun!"



And as they cried these words they waved their baskets in unison, meaning, "Let *me* carry for you!"

But we had to acquire more than a packet of pins to need a porter. The next purchase of a dozen buttons made the situation more acute, and finally when the first sizable package, wrapped in an old dirty newspaper, was added to our burdens, the clamoring of the boys became so violent and there were so many fights among them over who should be privileged to carry for us, that we were forced to give in and indicate one of them as our property.

But that did not prevent the rest of them from following as before. Feeling ran high at our choice. There were several brawls, the rowdiest of which had to be stopped by a khaki-clad native policeman.

Most of our shopping took place in narrow, dark little alleys, lined on both sides with tiny shops, one next to an-

other, and all alike except for their goods. The merchants sat casually on the floors of their shops, which were raised about two feet from the muddy ground on which we stood.

Several times we were almost run down by donkeys, ridden or driven by their owners whose shouts of warning we were not familiar with, any more than they would be if we were suddenly to shout, "Fore!"

Accompanying us on some of these shopping trips was Kerim, the servant of the Judge. Things went more smoothly then. He would shout at the annoying crowds and deal out a blow here and there to the boldest, just to show what he could really do if he got started. He had errands, too, in the bazaars, since he was the manager of the Judge's servants and household.

Kerim was surprised at us.

"Something wrong with the Memsahibs," he complained to his master.

"Something wrong, Kerim?"

"Yes, Sahib, they refuse tea in the morning!"

Morning tea came at five o'clock, as in most English houses. Unless one remembered to refuse it the night before, the Boy brought the steaming tea and wafers just when one was catching the best moments of sleep. Kerim was shocked at our un-English ways as our own staff in Brooksville had been when we gave orders that morning tea was to be served only to Douglas and Henri.

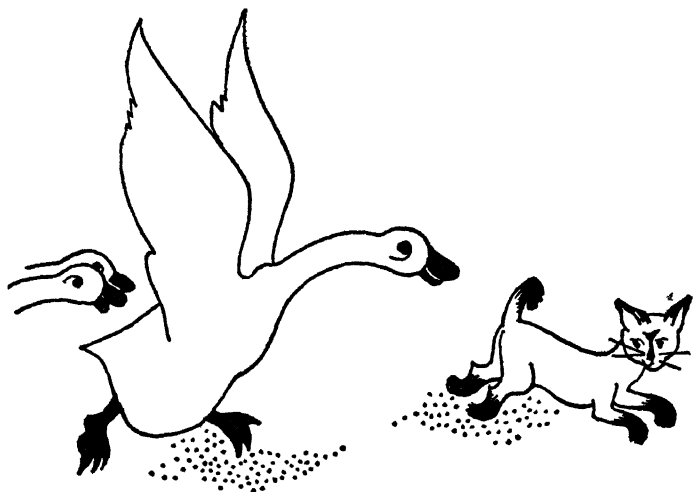
At the end of four days we were so well entertained that we were hollow-eyed from unaccustomed late hours. We longed for our simple existence in the desert. We thought of Girlcat's coming accouchement and the other duties of our household. Perhaps Abbas had neglected the geese, or the Cook was getting careless in preparing Douglas's suet pudding or Henri's soufflé. We suddenly wanted to be home as

soon as possible. We were eager, too, to put down in paint our impressions of the thick green of Basrah palms.

When the reports came that the roads had sufficiently dried from the last rain, we decided to drive back home. A car had come through from Amarah the day before, someone said. The trip by road would take only one day, as against three or four by boat, even if we stopped at the Mutasarrif's in Amarah for dinner as arranged.

One of Kerim's friends agreed to hire himself and his car to us for the journey. He came to interview us, but optimism did not seem to be one of his strong points. He said that *perhaps* we would get through, Allah willing. True, a car had come through from Amarah yesterday, but (and he looked sadly at the gray heavens) if it rained again it might be very dangerous, Allah forbid.

But we decided to take our chances and start the next day.



XVI

The Mutasarrif at Home

WHILE EVERYONE WAS bustling about, getting us off, we noticed that Achmed, the driver, hung a string of bright blue beads on the dashboard of the car. We knew then that the Evil Eye would not dare to bother us on this trip.

In addition, at the last moment, our host pressed into our hands, as if he had forgotten them before, two fine old hand-illuminated Korans. These were more welcome to us than the overflowing baskets of food that he had provided for us in case of need, for we felt that we could never eat another mouthful after the tremendous hospitality of Basrah.

It took only half an hour of driving to find out that someone had been mistaken about the roads. They were not dry. They were so wet from the previous rain that they were practically non-existent in places. We remembered regretfully the security of the *Mal de Mer*.

But we went on.

Soon we saw an old Arab coming toward us. He was on foot and his tattered *abba* blew around his thin legs. He was



slipping and sliding and much too busy to take much notice of us.

Achmed slowed up when we met him.

"How is the road?" Achmed called out.

"Good!" answered the old man, as he just managed to catch his balance on two lumps of syrupy mud.

So we went on.

We had almost reached Qurnah, where we were to see the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Kerim had told us to look out for it), when something went wrong with the car.

Achmed stopped in the middle of the road. He told us that the motor was tired, and that we would rest it a little. It had been too hard work, he said, struggling out of the deep mud ruts and traveling so much of the time in low speed. A second

stop of this kind and we saw that the radiator was steaming and boiling.

Achmed got out and filled an empty petrol tin with water from a nearby canal. He unscrewed the radiator cap and poured, or started to pour. There was a terrible sizzling, and a cloud of steam rose up. Achmed jumped back, much surprised. (We found on later trips that this procedure never failed to surprise Arab drivers.)

Achmed laughed when he recovered from the uprush of steam. It was a big joke to him.

"Do not be afraid!" he consoled us.

"But you will crack something!" (We were not sure what cracked in a case like this.) "And we will be stuck here!"

"Allah willing, we will reach Amarah tonight," said Achmed, and he smiled as if *we* were the idiots.

It was difficult to understand how Allah could do much if Achmed willingly ruined the engine.

But we did reach Qurnah.

There was the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil lying across a path, just as it happened to have fallen so many aeons ago. It is a sacred place for brides. They come as they have done for many years with little offerings of their own blood, which they smear on the already much-stained tree. And it is a punishable offense (even for an American college boy) to take away a chip of this tree as a souvenir.

From there on we were more hopeful. The roads seemed even worse, but we were slowly approaching Amarah. Once there we were safe. His Excellency the Mutasarrif would be waiting for us with tea and dinner and we were just convincing ourselves that things were not so bad, when the rain began.

In Iraq even a half hour's rain from Heaven is a fearful thing on these roads. It is actually to be feared. We saw one or two abandoned cars that looked as if they would be there

for a long time. There were no passengers and no drivers. This happened frequently. We ourselves, a few months later, abandoned our car on the road. It was there for weeks before we were able to send another car for it. It had happened on a wedding day, too.

At one spot the driver turned to us and pointed off into the desert.

"Out there," he said, trying with one hand to keep the car balanced on the slightly higher center of the road, "out there was where Sheikh Abdul Adi was lost last summer."

We remembered hearing about this Sheikh and his family who took a short cut on the desert to a camp he was to visit. Months later he and the other occupants of his car were found, skeletons on the desert, their bones picked clean by eagles. They had lost their way and had finally run out of water and petrol. As we remembered the grim details, it seemed impossible to imagine this wet desolation as the dry desert that it becomes in summer.

A mile outside the town of Amarah we were met by armored cars. They had been sent by the Mutasarrif to search for us since we were so late in arriving. Like heroines we paraded into town under escort.

We were led up an outside staircase to the second floor of the Governor's palace, built by the Turks before the war, and now used as a residence and official quarters for the Mutassarif of the Amarah *liwa* (district).

His excellency the Mutasarrif was an amiable man and a good host.

He had a surprise for us, for there were Douglas and Henri. They had driven down from Brooksville to take us home. The rain had given them a holiday since it had caused the Plant to be flooded and shut down for a day.

It was such a relief to be off the nerve-racking roads that this tea party was suddenly a gay affair. With a quick smile

and large, soft eyes, the Mutasarrif watched to see that we ate *all* the pound cake (imitation English for our benefit) and that our cups were never empty. Sandwiches and cigarettes were passed by menservants in half-European and half-Arab costumes—that is, a skirt dress, a European jacket, and an Arab headdress.

Douglas had news.

During our absence Girlcat had had her kittens.

The Mutasarrif consoled us for not having been there with Girlcat, but Douglas said that he was of the opinion that Girlcat had said to herself, "Here is a swell chance to have some peace and quiet and a few babies." He told how he had come into the house and found her lying in a basket, which Henri had provided for her, with four lovely, white rat-like creatures beside her. They had given some milk to Girlcat and, the next day, beaten eggs, just as we had instructed them to do in case this happened.

We suspected that the room in which we sat had been especially dressed up for our coming. We rather hoped so. There were doilies and artificial flowers and some *objets d'art* scattered about. Our chairs were arranged in the customary Iraqi circle. The cushions were pointed out proudly to us. They had been made as a special gift for His Excellency by the school children of the town.

"They are amazing!" we said when asked for our opinions.

And indeed they were amazing. They were all gold and glitter, made of the carefully hoarded gilt-foil wrappings from a popular brand of Iraqi cigarettes. These bits of magnificence were sewed together on to a base of pink cerise silk, and in the middle, surrounded by this brilliancy, was a photograph of the Mutasarrif himself. (It did not seem quite right for us to be sitting on the Mutasarrif this way.)

Later we were shown through the palace. It had a certain

charm in its nonchalance and casualness. It spread over a large area, with a central court that was roofed in glass. On every floor wooden balconies ran around the four sides of the court, and all the rooms gave off from these. Painted and decorated wooden pillars supported the wide balconies, and everywhere it seemed to us that guards and servants and children and cats were all mixed up.

We liked the Mutasarrif because he liked cats.

We asked him about his children. He presented to us a boy of about ten. We think his name was Habib.

"Good day!" Habib said. He shook hands and looked very smart and trim, with long trousers, jacket, tie, and a handkerchief in his pocket. At every subsequent visit Habib came to keep us company. He never said anything more than "Good day." It was all the English he knew, but his father was ambitious for him. He wanted the child to be around Europeans whose ways he would thus get to know.

We were not shown the women's quarters, of course. But we did see the new bathroom that was under construction. The water had not yet been connected, but it was promised for the next time we should come.

There stood proudly a real W.C. and beside it was a modern tub, straight-lined and beautiful. It might as well have been in a Park Avenue penthouse.

"Congratulations!" we said to the Mutasarrif, because congratulations are in order on the accomplishment of such a feat in a little Arab town.

But our admiration was too much for our charming Mutasarrif.

"Look!" he exclaimed.

And he himself unmasked the tub by lifting up the false tin shell that fitted over an ordinary old-fashioned four-footed tub!

We were then shown the big bed in which the great King Feisal had slept when visiting this town some years ago. The next occupant was to be the present young King Ghazi, Feisal's son, who was scheduled to make a flying trip through his country the following year.

Dinner was announced, and we were plied with chicken, rice, partridge, and gazelle. At our own table we never served gazelle because we felt as if we were eating our own pet gazelle. And Douglas hated the idea of shooting these animals. But we were pleased to taste it here and found that the meat was extremely good, sweet and solid, and tender as veal.

The *pièce de résistance*, however, was the fish course.

This dish was prepared from large fish caught in the Tigris. These are sliced through their middles, powdered well with curry, and then roasted while standing on end against a fire usually made with dried camel dung. When they are done, the fish are laid on huge platters and garnished with tomatoes. It was a delicious dish that the Mutasarrif served to us. It was beautiful, too, with the red of the tomatoes, the yellow curry, and the white meat of the fish. It should have been eaten (as we did later at our own and other Iraqi houses) by scooping it up with the fingers. But the Mutasarrif and his staff ate with forks to please us, so we were obliged in turn to eat with forks to please them.

During dinner we spoke of the difficulties and delays in placing the marriage bans. As usual the Iraqis had unending patience. Why all the hurry? They said that their marriages were just as binding in the betrothal stage as they were after the wedding, that neither one party nor the other may change his mind.

When we started for home, His Excellency sent with us an escort of a machine gun car, saying that nothing must happen to us that might disgrace him as a host.

We were all eager to reach Brooksville that night, looking

forward to the comfort of our familiar surroundings. We were sure that Abbas would have a cold chicken in the ice box. And there would be cheese and *kubz* and tea, and a fire in the grate to welcome us. Abbas had been told that we would return today.

With each lurch and slippery escape on the roads, we consoled ourselves that we were nearer to our mud house. The salt in the ground in certain places made difficult going, and we could feel those areas as we came upon them by the increased but different slitheriness. The machine gun car slid worse and farther than ours did.

Chains kept coming off and were finally given up. A walk back to where one or two lay buried in twelve inches of thin mud was no fun. The machine gun car did not like waiting at those times. To keep going was the thing. Stops were to be avoided at all costs, for it was difficult to get started again.

Finally, skidding through our own gate, we arrived home at two o'clock in the morning. Everyone was cold and wet and miserable. Our escort turned around to make the return trip, and by a substantial tip to the sergeant we hoped to recompense them for their hard night.

In our own grounds, as we got out of the car, there was no one to be seen. The house was in complete darkness. Then suddenly Ali the Night Watchman came running with his gun and bare feet.

Ali seemed worried. He grunted, and came to the door with us. It was locked.

"Where is Abbas?" asked Henri, kicking at the next door when he found it was locked too. (We had never used the locks, since someone was always in the house.)

Ali went to the next door and tried it. But he only grunted. He followed Henri's example and knocked at it with the butt of his gun. He was a bit stupid from having just waked up, we guessed.

"*Where* is Abbas?" This time Henri yelled it at Ali.

"Abbas has the keys!" sorrowfully said Ali, shaking his head.

"*Where is he?*" Douglas stood with his shoulder to a door, forcing a lock.

"He is in jail!" finally admitted Ali. And then he trembled in fear.

"Jail!"

Ali reluctantly told us then that Abbas had locked all the doors and taken the keys with him when he started for Ali Gharbi. On the way Abbas had got into a bloody fight in Jassim's café, and when it had, in Jassim's opinion, become serious enough, he had sent someone to the post several miles up. Two police had come down and dragged Abbas away to repent of his ways.

Douglas and Ali finally broke down the doors so that we could get into our cold house, find an empty ice box, and crawl into unmade beds.

Abbas never came back. He had taken with him a watch that Henri had lent to him so that we might have our dinners on time. He had sold a boat that did not belong to him. (The friend who bought it came to claim it a few days later.) Abbas had also borrowed on future salary the sum of two *dinars* from Simon. And then he owed a few *fls* here and there, mostly to his inferiors on the servant staff. We found from time to time other evidences of his cleverness.

We admitted that our faith had suffered, but, we said, we had never liked the fishy look in his eye anyway!

Who would take his place?

And then along came Jeeves.

XVII

Circus in Iraq

SOMEHOW, WITHOUT writing a single word to anyone about our search for a new First Boy, everyone within several hundred miles seemed to know about it and tried to help us find one.

Then one night Mohammed appeared out of nowhere.

He had dropped from Heaven, Henri said. As far as we knew, no buses or cars had arrived. There was simply a knock at the door and there he stood. After all, we were in the well-known Flying Carpet country and we asked no questions. We took him on.

Our past domestic trials had made us a bit uneasy, but this Boy looked as if he were friendly with soap, and seemed alert and honest. He agreed to the wages at once. During the conversation he spoke fluently, but which language we were not certain in the excitement of the moment.

The next day he took charge. We discovered that it was English that he had tried to speak the night before. But he seemed to have improved it during those few hours.

Of course there was exaggerated courtesy on both sides. On our side there was also an uncomfortable awareness of a new

servant in the house who, from the standpoint of an Englishman, might bring tragedy in the form of a cold cup of tea in the morning, or who might ruin the day with a too superior "Good Morning" or no "Good Morning" at all. We waited for a definite sign of the handwriting on the wall, some gesture or some word to indicate what we were to expect from this new Boy.

If, thought we, he is going to be inefficient, and perhaps drunk besides, we will have to be resigned until we can replace him. If, on the other hand, he proves to be promising, we will spend the rest of our lives training him. We did not dare hope for a Jeeves.

The sign of what our future was to be with Mohammed in the house came at exactly twelve o'clock that first day.

We were playing at deck tennis in the side garden to work up an appetite for lunch. Suddenly but quietly Mohammed appeared in white, very, very laundered and correct.

He stood faultlessly at attention until we stopped our play.

"What is it, Mohammed?" we asked.

He drew himself up, Jeeves-like.

"Memsahib, the cats' lunch is served," he announced.

But the cats were not the only animals that needed attention.

The very next day a couple of Bedouins, very un-social register, came along with a Gazelle.

They wanted to sell it to us for five hundred *fi*ls. Five hundred *fi*ls is approximately two dollars and fifty cents. We knew that they really expected about half of this sum, so we came to an agreement in a few minutes. As part of the bargain they consented to sit quietly for us while we made sketches of them and the Gazelle.

They were much amused, but restless, while they posed. The Gazelle begged for a cigarette each time they took out a fresh

one. One of the Bedouins broke a cigarette in half and gave the Gazelle one part to eat while he lit the other for himself. The Gazelle chewed and swallowed the whole of his portion with great satisfaction and then nuzzled around the Bedouin's cloak for more. As we grew to know this animal we sometimes gave him cigarettes to reward him for his sweetness. But no advertiser has ever asked for his testimonial on his preference for any particular brand.

The Bedouins told us to feed the Gazelle *kubz*, so we sent to the kitchen for some, and from that day on, the consumption of *kubz* in the household increased about fifty percent, though the Gazelle could not have eaten that much in any case.

This nice Gazelle would look at you with his enormous black eyes, as if he were actually thanking you for keeping him in grass, *kubz*, and cigarettes. He had a funny little grunt and a fawn-colored coat with a white stomach and derrière. His stumpy tail busily switched the annoying flies away, and his delicate little legs stamped the ground like a miniature horse. We came to love him very much, and later we wept over his tragic end.

But that first day we only watched our Gazelle and made sketches that we showed to the two Bedouins. They laughed and laughed.

The two Bedouins were rough-looking men, but they must have had a soft spot in their hearts for this animal, because he was the tamest and the gentlest Gazelle we had seen. He stayed in the house with us whenever he was not grazing in the yard.

The cats loved him. They played with his long ears, while he lay on the floor chewing contentedly at something stolen from a table (a drawing most likely). The cats would push down the long ears with their paws, and then watch them flop back into place. The Gazelle would let them play on

until he grew hungry again, and then he would get up to explore the contents of the cats' dishes.

Almost everything the cats liked in the way of food, the Gazelle liked too. He could scare them away from their milk and cereal in the morning by a snuffing sound he made when he stuck his snout into the bowl. He even ate meat and potatoes with the cats.

On the desert in the summer we saw small herds of these gazelles soaring to some rendezvous unknown to us. For they did seem to fly in the great, graceful bounds that they took. Their speed was such that it was difficult to follow them. They were the same color as the desert, and very quickly they were lost to sight except for their white derrières that were visible for a second or so longer.

We had a *wowi* too, and he was now growing up.

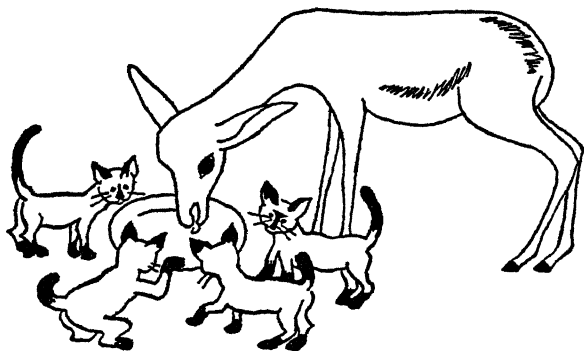
Wowi is the Arab's name for jackal. The word is really the imitation of the howl of these animals, and if you increase its volume and give it the weirdest sound you can, you will get a vague idea of the terrible cry of these wild creatures when they hunt in packs at night.

One day Douglas had seen a couple of little Arab boys tormenting a small animal. It was a baby *wowi* which they had found on the desert. Douglas bought the half-dead animal from the boys for the sum of fifty *fi*ls, and brought him to the house for us to keep until he died.

But the *Wowi* lived.

We fed him for weeks with an eyedropper. Sometimes we persuaded Girlcat to let him nurse from her. As the little thing grew stronger, we took him out on a lead, and he acted like a young puppy.

We were criticized by the Qaim Maqqam when he came for tea. He said that no one made pets of *wowis*. It simply wasn't done. Simon advised us too that we could never keep



him and that it was silly anyway. Once he was big and strong enough, he would prefer his freedom, we thought, but we decided to keep him until he was old enough to fend for himself.

In a month or so the *Wowi* grew about twice his original size, and shortly after that we unfastened his leash one day and let him go. We hated to see him run joyfully toward the desert, waving his foxy tail behind him.

Two nights later we were awakened by his weird howl, and we hurried out into the garden to look for him. Ali the Brave, watching by night, was frightened by our sudden appearance. He had heard nothing.

"*Wen el Wowi?*" (Where is the *Wowi*?) we shouted at him.

"*Marco Wowi!*" he answered, meaning the *Wowi* doesn't live here any more.

"*Ruh!*" we told Ali to go, because we knew that the *Wowi* would not take chances with him around. Then, we called to the animal, and in a few minutes he was at our feet, crying as if to tell us that to go out into the world was not all it was cracked up to be. He was ready for the Fatted Calf, which in this case consisted of a cold chicken wing and a saucer of milk from the Frigidaire.

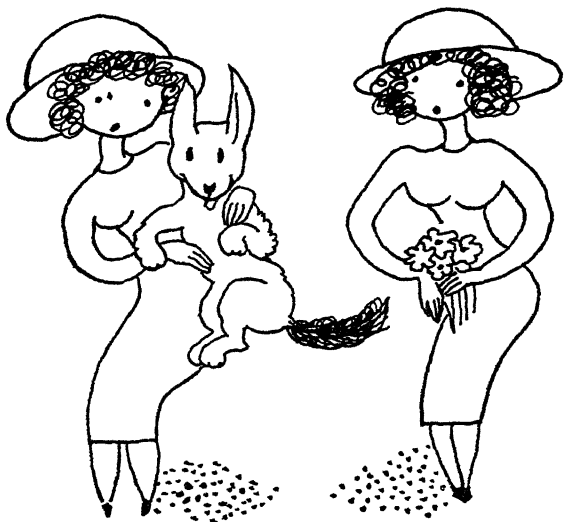
The *Wowi* never left us again until a year later, when suddenly he disappeared. We suspected that one of the staff of domestics had done away with him, but we were never able to find out anything definite.

From the time that he came back into the garden that night he was never put on a lead again, and he lived in either one of two flower beds which he selected from all the garden. These were thick and deep and gave him shade in the daytime. While it was light he hid there, as was natural for him to do, and he seldom let himself be seen by anyone except us. When we called him he came immediately. He was always delighted with a plate of meat and vegetables, but he was even more pleased just to play.

He would roll on his back like a dog, and let us tickle his stomach. He would help us pick flowers by jumping up at us and coaxing us to play. If we threw a flower at him, a pink or purple or yellow flower, he would catch it in his mouth and run off with it, coquettish as Carmen. Or he would pull at our skirts, tearing with his strong teeth, until we paid some attention to him.

Sometimes we were able to lure him into the house, where there was a long mirror that attracted him. Unlike the cats, who never seemed to see themselves in a mirror, the *Wowi* was fascinated by the other *wowi* who looked at him from the glass. He would stare at this strange animal and then growl, because that *wowi* mocked his every movement. All of a sudden our *Wowi* would turn and run out the door, to be back in a few minutes for another look at his double.

He sat with us when we had our evening's drink on the terrace on the riverbank. There were always a few salted almonds to throw to him or a sardine sandwich that he liked. He would go to the river's edge to drink and explore around a bit, but he must have watched our movements carefully, for the moment we went to the dining room he was there waiting under the windows in the garden. We were sure then to offer



him some of the best bits of the roast beef, lamb, or chicken. Henri complained because the *Wowi* got all the attention, with our hanging out the windows to feed him. Henri said he preferred our front views.

The gardener 'Brahim did not care for the *Wowi* either.

But we noticed that he used the animal as a fine excuse for poor melons at the table. His story was that the *Wowi* came each night to the melon beds, sampled the good melons by taking one bite from each, and left only the tasteless ones that graced our table every day.

The staff hated the *Wowi*.

None of the servants would warm up to the idea of a *wowi* in the family. When we were away in Amarah or Baghdad for a few days, we were sure that no one even tried to feed him. It was useless to ask anyone to do it because he would not have eaten from their hands anyway. He was a two-girl *wowi*.

When we returned from a few days' absence the *Wowi*, despite 'Brahim's story about the melons, would be so hungry

that he would come running to us, less likely than usual to be cautious.

The cats were jealous.

They tried to high-hat the *Wowi*. But he liked them. He liked Boycat. Especially Boycat. He would take a nip at the knobby black tail as Boycat lay in the cool garden paths. Then the *Wowi* would make a quick getaway, knowing Boycat to be his superior if too much aroused.

If the *Wowi* found a cup of milk labeled "Boycat," he would drink it with extra pleasure, but with an eye out for Boycat's sudden appearance, with his fierce black face and blue eyes. Then the *Wowi* would come to us, roll slyly on his back, wave his paws, and bite playfully but painfully at our fingers.

Sometimes we left the cats waiting at the gate for us while we walked up the river path for a mile or so. We would take the Gazelle, straining at his lead, while the *Wowi* would bring up the rear, like a dog. The Arabs we met on our walk would have been just as surprised had we had an elephant on a lead and a lion as a watchdog.

The Arabs and some of the English who visited us warned us that jackals carried rabies. The answer seemed to be not to have a jackal. But how could we ask our *Wowi* to go back to the desert where he had no cool flower beds to hide in and no bread and milk to make him grow strong and healthy? We decided that as long as the *Wowi* liked his lodgings, we would take our chances.

But the saving of one *wowi* had caused the undoubted death of six more. For the day that Douglas had paid fifty *filis* for ours, he had unwittingly created a market for baby *wowis*. The next morning the same boys had come to the house with a basketful of little *wowis*, and they were much surprised because we would not take them off their hands, even at a reduced figure.

XVIII

More Animals

BOYCAT HAD GROWN from an apartment cat to a great animal that could fight anything going. Girlcat, on the other hand, stayed well within the walls and fences of the grounds, except for occasional tours. In this territory she reigned supreme. If an unsuspecting dog strayed within the gates, she did not need to fight to get rid of him. All she had to do was to appear, and the dog was out of the gate like a shot.

One day a stray cow wandered into the grounds and grazed at our best sweet peas. Girlcat, who was watching over her young children's antics, leaped at the cow as if the great beast were a mouse, and she chased the terrified animal out of the yard almost as far as the road. She came back to her children who had not even noticed the cow, and sat down and began to wash her hind legs thoroughly, as if nothing had happened.

We found Girlcat batting a small snake around on several occasions. We thought once that she had been bitten by a snake, for she had a bad paw for several weeks and appeared to be listless and ill. Whether she could have coped with a big snake, such as were often found, we were not sure.

Our chosen pets were not the only animals around. A so-called wildcat came and was killed by the Gardener.

A fox sneaked in one day and was shot by the Watchman.

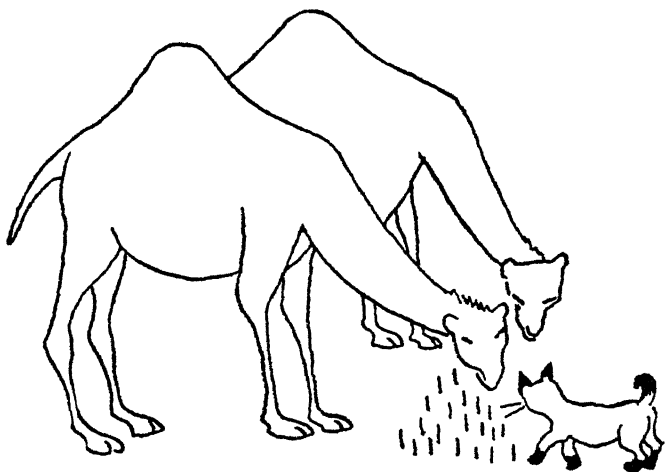
Then there were rats during the flood times, which were forced out of their houses and came hungry for anything they could get. Boycat and Girlcat frequently caught rats half as big as they were.

In the garden we found hedgehogs. And plenty of wild dogs that seemed to belong to no one stood outside the gates waiting for the waste from the kitchen to be thrown into the garbage pits.

Of a smaller size, but more bothersome, were the tremendous cockroaches. They seemed impossible to get rid of. No matter what we did to prevent them, they swarmed into the kitchen. Most of the kitchen work, such as peeling vegetables, stirring cakes, and pounding sugar from compressed cones into granulated form, was done on the kitchen floor. We could never persuade the staff to use the tables when we were not there, so the cockroaches could never be got rid of. All the rooms were on the ground floor, and when a war was on against these pests, all they had to do was to retire from the scene of action until the vigilance was relaxed; then in great armies, the horrible-looking beasts, inches long, would come parading in again.

Besides, there were flies, mosquitoes, and little invisible creatures called sand flies that bit with great intensity and insistence. All these had to be guarded against by Flit guns and closely-woven mosquito nets. Gallons of Flit were used every month. In the summer it was the most essential thing in the household.

Flit could also be used to kill the scorpions we found in the house. And the centipedes. We never put on a shoe without first shaking it out. Scorpions love the nice dark insides of



your best bedroom slippers. And they hate being disturbed while there.

Ants grew an inch long, and they were a shiny black variety whose teeth must surely have been sharpened regularly. Sandals were not a practical form of footwear.

Clinging to the walls were transparent lizards. They were amusing to watch and welcome for their snaring of flies and other insects. So clever were they in their technique that they could have given pointers to generals in wartime.

More frightening were the spiders. We were never sure what they might do. They were huge and fierce-looking.

Bats lived in the rafters in the main house. We did not mind them particularly. But the birds who insisted on nesting in the studio when finally it was finished annoyed us because we were constantly called upon to feel sorry for them. There were always battles between them and the cats. After all we had not invited them in. The casualties were comparatively few, and when these took place, we went on the theory that the birds should have known enough to avoid such a dangerous nesting place.

These birds watched for us to enter or leave the studio. The instant that the doors were open, the clever creatures would swoop in or out as the case might be. They brought up their young in the nests built in the beams, while the cats were always on the lookout from the highest chairs or tables, from which they would sit gazing at the unreachable prey.

There was always a great commotion just as it grew light in the morning. That was when the birds woke up to the new day and commenced to chatter about getting outside. Since the studio was a bedroom for one of us, as well as a general living and working room for the two of us, it became an obligation to get up especially to accommodate the birds.

It would have been easy to get rid of them, but we began to feel a kind of responsibility for them, due to the very fact that they had chosen such a curious place as a shelter.

The acquisition of the two lambs was really an offering of thanks.

One day Mohammed brought word to us that Henri had crashed while trying out his new plane. (He kept the plane in a mud hangar out on the desert in the middle of nothing.)

Douglas was away in Egypt, so we were alone except for the servants. We all ran out of the house in great excitement. The coolies and workmen from the Plant followed while we hurried toward the hangar.

Halfway out a coolie met us with the news that it was not a serious accident. The plane had struck the bank of an irrigation ditch in landing and had broken its propeller.

We went out to verify this and were relieved to see Henri getting the plane into the hangar.

"Okay?" we called out.

"Okay!" he answered, "but *Mon Dieu*, it will take eight weeks to get another propeller!"

On the way back Mohammed walked on one side of us, all

spick and span, ready to serve lunch in his starched white uniform, his bare brown feet kicking up the dust. Trotting behind us was Yusef, unable to stop chattering about the good fortune of Mr. "Pepper" Sahib (Yusef could not pronounce the French name). On the other side of our party rode an Arab on a prancing mare, and just ahead a shepherd was driving two crying lambs who were calling for their mothers. They were on their way to the market, and were destined to be someone's dinner for the next day, and a part of a fur coat on Fifth Avenue next season. They were the only sad note in the whole party.

Such sadness, we thought, did not belong in a world so gay and beautiful. The distant tents of the Bedouins were black dots upon the fresh green of the new grass on the desert, and the mountains had clouds of creamy white hanging over them.

"Little lambs," we said, "we will buy you as an offering of thanks!"

"And you need not cry for your mothers."

We carried them home.

They were fed from baby bottles on the milk of a water buffalo. Their feeding became a part of our daily chores, and because they were such little nuisances, they endeared themselves to us beyond our expectations.

There was only one other animal that we wanted to add to our collection—a funny creature who lived in a cotton merchant's shop in the *souks* of Baghdad.

He was a *chelb mai* in Arabic. But what he was in English we never found out. The literal translation of *chelb mai* is water dog, but he may have been a sort of otter or beaver or something like that. We had discovered him one day when Ali the Shopper was escorting us through the bazaars, and after that we went in to see him whenever we were in Bagh-

dad. We suspected that he recognized us because of the ten *fls'* worth of raw beef we brought him on those occasions.

The *Chelb Mai* was a low, flat, dark-brown animal that dearly loved to roll on the mud floor and be tickled. He had whiskers like a seal, and his tail was flat and long. His little cat-like eyes seemed to take in everything, and when he was pleased, he whistled. When his master called to him he came immediately.

We made offers to buy him.

He would make a good friend for Boycat and Girlcat, we thought. (We hoped they wouldn't eat him up.) He would have the whole Tigris to play in.

But his master was not eager to sell him. He increased his price each time we came. The bargaining went on, spread over a year's time. We did not know that there was another bidder, and a royal one at that.

Finally we told Douglas about the *Chelb Mai*, and he advised us to buy him even at what seemed a high figure to us. He was curious about this animal.

But when we entered the shop, the next time we went to the bazaars, no *Chelb Mai* answered our call.

"What do you want for the *Chelb Mai* today?" we asked.

"The *Chelb Mai*?" said he, as if he had never heard of him before.

"Yes, where is he?"

"Why, *Khatun*, the King bought him this very morning."

"The King!" we gasped. "You mean King Ghazi?"

"Yes, *Khatun*, but I have others just as good."

And in surprise we followed him to a little cubbyhole in the back of the shop, from which he produced a sack. Out of the sack he drew a dozen skins that had been *Chelb Mais* in their time.

We were sad that day. Later on when we asked the King

about his new acquisition, he said that he had never heard of such an animal.

Thousands of camels drank from the Tigris and they not only drank but they snorted and they groaned and they snarled. Altogether it added up to the weirdest sound that we had heard in Iraq. These camels, driven down from the pastures of the tribes that owned them, could be heard drinking at all hours of the night because they came in one shift after another of about a hundred camels each.

When we awakened in the middle of the night, we listened to them along with the other night sounds such as the screams of the wild jackals, the barking of dogs, and the whistling of Ali when he looked for robbers.

One day at sundown we walked up the river to where the camels were watering to see at close hand what was going on. We found camels of all kinds: disdainful ones, nonchalant ones, grumbling ones, spiteful ones, and just plain indifferent animals who did not care what we thought of them. Hundreds of these "ships of the desert" walked to the river and back, making a procession as far into the desert as we could see.

We sketched a mother camel and her child, much to the amusement of the herdsmen who stood about watching us in approximately the same manner that we watched the camel. When the sketch was done one of the herdsmen leaned over it and said, "*Mu zen*" (no good).

As you probably know from your Lawrence, nothing is wasted in the desert. The women, as we watched, were carefully heaping up the droppings and piling them into low, flat bowls which they lifted to their heads and majestically carried away to their camps and home fires. This dung, after being molded into cakes to dry, is used for fuel.

The women who gathered the fuel were beautiful in their

shapeless, bright cotton dresses, one in vivid red, one in fierce, new green with a chintzy print, and another in dull, dusty blue from the looms of Japan—material costing here the equivalent of four cents a yard. (Every year this class of woman gets a new dress, which is sewed up for her in the market place.) Their *abbas* as usual fell from their heads to the ground and trailed as they walked. Spun and woven by the women themselves from the wool of their own sheep, these *abbas* would offer a new discovery to some designer on the lookout for new materials. The skins of the women were brown from the sun and their eyes heavy with make-up. (They use the powdered *kohl* put on with pointed wooden sticks.) Their hair was hennaed and their faces and arms liberally tattooed with simple designs in blue. Between the folds of one *abba* we saw a design made up of a line of dots around the neck which led straight down the throat between the breasts, with arrows for direction. We wondered if Elizabeth Arden could beat that for allure.

A few of the women stopped to watch us. They probably thought we were a very poor lot: no nose rings, no tattooing, no anklets, and *such* ugly clothes! Sometimes when we had stopped at their tents or on the road, and when there were no men around, they had become very bold. They not only offered us their babies, as in the case of the syphilitic coolie's child, but they actually lifted one or two struggling infants up on the saddle and set them there. We would much rather have been offered their silver anklets, and they sometimes had got so far as to take these off their own ankles to try them on ours, but they grabbed them back at the first sign of admiration on our part. Once they took a handkerchief from one of our pockets and laughed at it (as you might snicker over a hat your neighbor wears *after* she leaves your tea party). Sometimes they fingered the whipcord of our ready-made jodhpurs as if it were a Rodier Special.

With the camels at the river came the humped cattle be-



longing to the villages. There were also buffalo which waded out into the deep water and stood there lazily. It was from them that we got our milk. They were fierce at times and very awkward, but their milk was free from any possibility of tubercular germs.

Then came the donkeys, tended by little boys who had never heard of getting a prize for knowing where the tails belong. And more women came with their waterskins to be filled with the muddy Tigris. When filled, these skins looked like stuffed pigs, all their extremities sticking out. In reality they were skins of goats, and usually not too well cured. Each woman shouldered her burden and off she went, dripping, to her tent and endless chores.

But it got dark as we stood there on the riverbank and so we came away, thirsty like the camels—but for cold beer that awaited us in the *Frigidaire*.

XIX

The Baby Achmed

ONE DAY WHEN WE GOT back to the house after a ride in the desert we felt excitement in the air. We asked what it was all about. Mohammed explained. The Cook's wife was about to present him with a son (or so he hoped).

So far it had been Yusef's fortune to have only one child, and that a girl. He had prayed, he told us, for a son on several similar occasions. But he had been consistently disappointed. Each time there had been a miscarriage. So now everyone was in a state of excitement.

The Cook's love life had not been entirely his own doing. It had been arranged for him years ago by his former master, the Englishman who had turned him over to us. This man, seeing Yusef's tendencies towards the forbidden alcohol, had had a brilliant idea. He decided, since Yusef was too good a cook to lose, that he would find him a wife. Perhaps, he thought, Yusef would then begin to take life seriously. Perhaps family responsibilities would strengthen him. So the Englishman went to a marriage broker and asked for a girl for Yusef. He said he was willing to pay five *dinars* for her.



Then the master went back to Yusef whom he found mixing up a cake with a half-empty bottle of *arak* beside him. He explained to Yusef that he had procured for him a wife. But Yusef was to have this wife only on one condition: that he confine his drinking to his one day a month when off duty.

Yusef was delighted.

He promised faithfully to do as his master asked. He liked the idea of a wife, especially one free, because he knew that he could never have saved enough money to pay for one himself.

It was explained to him that of course she was not young (she was sixteen) and that she was not very beautiful (her parents had neglected to tattoo her when she was a child). But Yusef said, What could one expect for five *dinars*? He was lucky to get a wife at all. He prided himself on not being one of those who count the teeth of a gift horse.

So Yusef had married joyfully.

But to drink at the Fountain of Love could never quench Yusef's thirst for the more perfumed *arak*. It was not long before he was at his old ways again. It was somewhere about this time that Yusef was transferred to Douglas's employ.

Under the beautiful influence of the liquor of the date, Yusef developed a trait that was in the end to prove his undoing. He became generous. He became especially generous in the matter of buying his little daughter pretty things that he could not afford. Sometimes even his wife benefited by his extravagance.

Almost any morning when we came into the kitchen to check in the supplies from Ali Gharbi, we found some bit of finery lying carelessly in the supply baskets. If we caught sight of something dainty that lay like a glittering icing on a chunk of raw beef, then we knew Yusef had had a buying spree. It might turn out to be a new jacket or a dress or a yellow satin bonnet for Yusef's girl child.

Sometimes spangles or lace or cheap brocaded velvet in a cerise or purple color would be all mixed up in the potatoes. Once there was a pair of tiny silver anklets, with bells attached, that Yusef was showing off to the Latrine Boy (who was not supposed to be in the kitchen anyway). Yusef, on several occasions, hid these things from our eyes, no doubt in an effort to discourage any connection that might arise in our minds between these extravagances and the frequent visits of the police in search of him. For he was always in debt and could never catch up with himself financially.

We hoped for Yusef's sake that his new child would be a boy. There would be less necessity for him to ruin himself by buying pretty things.

The morning after Mohammed's warning, Yusef came to announce the news himself.

"Wife giving boy child!" he said, and he grinned proudly.

"What have you named him, Yusef?" we asked.

"I name him Achmed, and Memsahib, please—" Yusef smiled his best—"Memsahib giving brandy—wife?"

On such a special occasion we were sure that the brandy would at least assist Yusef in his strain of fatherhood.

"Memsahib come see? Sheep kill for baby?"

We went along to the Cook's place where a group of men and women were gathered before the door. Just at the entrance the red, new blood of a sheep was running away. The sheep was in its last moments, and as we stood waiting for the baby to be brought out, the butcher knelt over the sheep and proceeded to carve it up.

The sacrifice of a sheep on this occasion of joy was welcome to most of these onlookers because each one was presented with a portion as a gift from Yusef. The butcher handed out a liver here and a testicle there (Ali got a kidney or two) and we found a leg of roast mutton on our table that night for dinner.

During this bloody scene we were shown the object of all the celebrating. Yusef himself brought out his son to us. Though Achmed was not yet a day old, his eyes were gorgeously made up with *kohl*. A more curious and lovely little doll could not have been found in any shop.

Achmed was wrapped up mummy-fashion in faded red and dusty blue rags. On his head sat a little cap on which hung silver coins and turquoise-blue buttons made of stone to ward off the Evil Eye. His dark little face and enormous eyes were well set off by these rich colors.

"And what is this indigo cross marked on his cheek?" we asked.

Yusef answered, "Evil Eye!" and he looked around cautiously. Somehow we never got away from this fear or the precautions against it.

Around Achmed's neck hung a silver chain and a tiny silver box. Yusef opened the box and showed us the contents. There was a miniature Koran that would undoubtedly be of great value to Achmed when he grew up, as well as serving now as a charm or amulet to keep him well.

We walked slowly back to the house, prepared on that day

of Achmed's birth to expect a lax household until the excitement wore off.

The charm that Achmed wore around his neck, the charm that was supposed to protect him and keep him well, did not do its work. For a year later, when Yusef was no longer master of our kitchen, we met him one day in Kut. He greeted us and told us that Achmed had died a few days before. He had had a stomach-ache, said Yusef, and in a couple of hours he was gone.

"Of course," he explained, "woman make big fuss of these thing." And then he added, brightening up, "But Allah is good . . . new baby coming!"

XX

The Christmas Spirit

IT WAS A FEW DAYS BEFORE Christmas. Henri, being French, suggested that we celebrate that occasion by concentrating on a magnificent dinner. Douglas, being English, was of the opinion that a day of shooting would make a fine holiday. Both were really going to take the day off.

So far the men had had no holidays except two: the one day at the Mutasarrif's and a Mohammedan holiday at the end of the *Ramadan*, called the Feast of Id. Douglas had been unhappy at this last forced holiday. We never observed Sundays or Fridays (the Moslem Sunday). They went by without anyone noticing them. The work at the Plant had to go on if it were to be finished on schedule.

We were surprised at this willingness to celebrate Christmas. It started us thinking. Perhaps we all needed a little fun. We were growing stale.

The studio was still windowless. Great holes yawned in its walls, waiting for wooden window frames. No one knew when the carpenter could be persuaded to finish these, though

glass for the panes had been ordered from Amarah. Here was a place to exercise some of the patience of the East.

The tiles had miraculously been laid the day before, a little crookedly, but in place nevertheless. How beautiful they would be, we thought, after many polishings with the funny recipe that Yusef said only he knew. The dark, rich red shone in our imagination. (These tiles never did become anything like the tiles of our dreams, though everyone seemed to try hard enough to make them so.)

The walls of the studio had been plastered with the *juss* that had been left from the lot brought by camelback. These walls had turned out to be a soft gray-white, fine for hanging and trying canvases. But the progress on the studio had stopped there. It might be weeks before it was finished. (We could even see it never finished at all.)

But it was thrilling to look at.

Suddenly it occurred to us that we would start our Christmas celebration with a Christmas Eve Tea in the studio.

We still had a few hours to prepare for it, so we toured the house to pick out a few pieces of simple furniture that would go well in the studio. We borrowed a rug here and a table there; we took one of the carpenter-made chaise longues from the living room; we found a long wooden bench, the sort used in all Arab cafés, that we had forgotten about and let lie in the garden. We cleaned it up and went over it with a mixture of turpentine and umber and it became with this treatment a proud piece of furniture.

We had plenty of the cotton prints left from our curtain-making to stitch up quickly into flat cushions which we stuffed with straw from the supply boxes. Just right for the bench and the chaise longue, we said, and we squinted one eye each and saw that the color was good.

The place did not need much furniture. The two wooden pillars that stood in the middle of the room, holding up the

roof, were decoration in themselves. We had ordered them from Baghdad, and their capitals were roughly carved in the good traditional design used in old Iraqi houses. The fireplace was simple but it had a plain shelf on which we put a couple of porous water jugs of the country.

In spite of the lack of windows at the moment, the room looked exactly as we had dreamed it should. (We never changed it except to add a few white rugs found in Ali Gharbi, some easels, a bed, shelves for books, and long, white drapes at the windows. But it always remained the simple place that it was that Christmas Eve.)

Mohammed had a lot of suggestions. He was shocked at the simplicity that to him spelt poverty. We confined his efforts to helping with the actual tea plans.

"Cinnamon toast!" he said.

Mohammed was a good boy.

We sent a note by the Second Boy to Henri and Douglas, inviting them for tea at five *in the studio*.

Out of their boxes came our best Paris hats. We got ourselves up to do justice to the party.

At the last minute Mohammed came in with one of the large, blue enamel bowls filled with branches and leaves. On the floor they made a satisfying color combination with the red of the tiles.

But there was a slight mix-up in the invitation.

The note reached only Henri, and when at five Douglas came as usual to the house proper for his tea, he waited and rang in vain for attention. The kitchen was deserted. Everyone, even the Cook, was at the studio, rushing about in preparation, most of which consisted of the attempt to start a fire in the smoking fireplace.

We finally rescued Douglas from his resigned waiting, and Henri came with great curiosity. He liked the hats.

Mohammed brought in the tea (as if we were in a king's

palace). There sat a beautiful cake, the icing not yet hardened. It ran in pools up to the edge of the plate. We ate it with spoons. The cinnamon toast was cold but that was to be expected. The bread and butter sandwiches were minus butter, but they were spread with buffalo cream instead. And the tea was hot. The men even tolerated the fancily-folded napkins, though they had already become an issue in the household.

But the fireplace smoked. The cold winds blew through the window openings, and the candles (the only lights in the room) fluttered out one by one. We relit them and pretended that in spite of the discomforts we were enjoying it all. But when the denseness of a cloud of smoke made Douglas cough and choke on his toast, and when we pulled our coats more closely around us, we decided that it was time to move sensibly into the main house.

So the first part of our Christmas celebration was not much of a success.

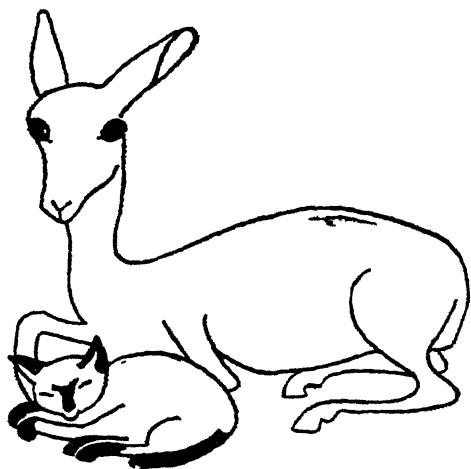
But there were to be many tea times in the studio during the months to come that were very pleasant; cozy times when the Gazelle stood, just able to reach the table, nosing in the tea things; when Boycat and Girlcat lay before the fire with their kittens, while we drank tea with one hand and cleaned brushes with the other; and times when the lambs begged for their bottles while we served tea to a passing guest.

On Christmas Day morning we called 'Brahim the Gardener.

We had decided to have a Christmas tree. The first thing to do was to find the nearest approach to one. We made a tour of the garden and the grounds, 'Brahim following.

"*There* is one!" said 'Brahim, pointing to a young palm tree. He had not the least idea of what a Christmas tree was like.

Finally on the riverbank we found a scrub tree about four



feet high. Its branches grew close to the ground, and its foliage was thick and dark green. It would do. With a little imagination it could be dressed up and manicured into something pretty good.

'Brahim cut it down, very puzzled. He carried it into the living room as we directed, and there we stood it in a copper pail, filling the pail with gravel. It was quite beautiful.

A branch or two, here or there, we snipped off. 'Brahim stood by wondering.

"Mohammed, bring some lemons and string!"

"Send to the kitchen for Lux!"

"Get some cotton, please!"

"'Brahim, go pick some radishes from the garden, as red as they come!"

We hung the lemons on the best branches with the aid of the string and old-fashioned brass clips from window drapes, which we pinched into the lemons. We tied the red, red radishes, foliage and all, to the smaller branches. Bright, brass curtain rings shone beautifully when we hung them in the dark green of the tree, and long strings of Woolworth pearls

and colored beads made stunning loops from one branch to another. We cut up some old velveteen, red and blue, into narrow strips to drape intricately in and out amongst the other trimmings. Bits of white, fluffy cotton we sprinkled in prominent places.

It was lovely!

Mohammed was interested. He brought empty, gilt cigarette boxes from which we cut stars and half-moons that would shine out from the top of the tree.

Then we went on a tour of the kitchen. The Cook Yusef was persuaded to part with a half-dozen wire skewers, on the sharp ends of which we stuck candles, and the blunt ends of which we bent round the branches of the tree. The Lux we sprinkled over the whole business.

When the tree was done, we called the animals.

Boycat and Girlcat were cautious at first. They never believed in the newness of things. But the kittens were less conservative. In a few minutes they were all on their hind legs, batting the pearls and beads back and forth, and swinging the curtain rings. The Gazelle showed no surprise whatever. He walked right up to the tree and ate the radish tops and some of the cotton fluffs, before we could stop him. The two lambs were not interested at all. They came crying and nosing at our skirts which meant, "Isn't it time for our bottles?"

Earlier in the day we had come upon masses of date palms in the kitchen yard.

"What in the world are these palms for, Mohammed?"

"That," said Mohammed, "is a secret, Memsahib!"

His smile led us to suspect a surprise for us, so we dropped the inquiry. But in the afternoon when Mohammed set the table for dinner, we noticed such unusual things as ladders being carried in, and there was so much excitement in the air that we were sure something extraordinary was going on.

(We were not very hopeful since their taste usually expressed itself in strange ways.)

When the dining room was ready, we were called in to view the finished work.

The room was a veritable forest.

Not another leaf or branch could have been crowded into the space. There were palm branches (slightly dusty ones) over every door and window, crossed one over another. Continuous rows of branches from our precious eucalyptus trees stood against all four walls. Pails of tall branches marked each of the four corners of the room, and designs in leaves were laid all over the top of the white cloth. Of course the napkins de luxe, more intricately folded than ever, were jutting out of the tumblers.

No doubt our staff had always pitied us a little. Poor people, they must have thought, they have no elegance. They have only a simple table, six chairs, and plain white drapes in this gray room. The only color is the red upholstery on the chair seats—no fancy silk cushions, no doilies, no bric-a-brac, no artificial flowers.

We thanked the staff for their initiative. (Thank Goodness, we thought, there is no Five and Dime Store around the corner.) Mohammed grinned and everyone was pleased.

There were other signs of festivity.

In the middle, or living, room, was a fruit cake, white with pink designs all over it, made by Yusef. It sat in a high old-fashioned cake dish. Plates and forks were there, tempting us to try it already.

We had planned a fine menu for dinner. There was to be turkey and all the things that go with it, though we had to scheme a bit for the cranberry sauce. We had ourselves gone to the kitchen to make a jelly of pomegranate juice. It had turned out beautifully and was an exquisite color. A kind of brown native truffle was to take the place of the sweet potatoes,

and the plum pudding was a date pudding, every bit as good.

In the afternoon a note came from Henri to tell us that he and Douglas would be very late. Several locos had gone off the line which would result in a long delay unless they drove up to insist on immediate action. A certain tribe had moved in the desert and, thinking the line was there for their special benefit, had walked their camels, donkeys, sheep, and horses on the wet roadbed, causing the derailment.

So we had time to do a few extra things. A final visit to the kitchen was advisable, to be sure that Yusef was not celebrating too, so we called on him in his domain.

"Everything good!" said Yusef, and he opened the door to the oven where the turkey lay surrounded by truffles.

We were just leaving the kitchen when there was a knock at the door. One of us answered it.

There stood Hussein.

Hussein was the supplies clerk at the Plant. He was an Indian, but he spoke good English. Hussein stepped into the kitchen and shook our hands.

"Good evening, ladies!"

"Good evening!"

We had never really met Hussein before. He weighed about two hundred pounds, and was dressed in riding breeches and khaki shirt. Hussein made a come-on motion towards the open door, and in a second in from the darkness came a woman who was obviously Mrs. Hussein and after her, a little girl.

"Since we are all Christians . . ." Hussein began.

We waited, wondering what to do. Yusef was standing by distractedly because he knew that Indian clerks did not come calling. It seemed to bother him much more than it did us.

"Since I am a Christian . . ."

We gathered that the world belonged to Mr. Hussein at that moment. This was one of his sprees in which he indulged



from time to time and which were carefully overlooked because he did his job well.

"I have come," said Hussein, waving his arm in a grand gesture, "to wish you ladies a Merry Christmas!"

"Thank you, thank you!"

"And," Hussein added, "my wife desires to wish you a Merry Christmas! And my daughter, she also desires to wish you a Merry Christmas!"

We thanked him again, but we could see no real use in wishing him the same, because we could see that his Christmas had already been a very merry one. But we said the words and glanced at Mrs. Hussein. She and the little girl both wore *abbas* hanging from their heads. But under Mrs. Hussein's cloak she wore a bright pink satin dress with blue

flowers on it. She was a large woman. Her waistline was at her hips, and from there on down hung a pleated skirt just to the knees. Cotton stockings and high-heeled shoes completed her costume.

Under the little girl's *abba*, her dress, unlike her mother's, fell to her bare feet and dragged a little. (It would have been highly immodest for a little girl to wear a short dress.)

"Since we are all Christians together . . ."

And we shook hands all over again.

The three of them stood uneasily, and all of a sudden we thought of the cake. (It seemed we must do something.)

We suggested refreshment. The invitation was accepted at once.

The three of them preceded us through the pantry and into a small room that led into both living room and dining room. The door to the latter was open and, quite naturally, they went through it. There was the table ready for dinner. Hussein led the way, confidently now, and without hesitation each of them sat down to a place at our beautiful table.

Mohammed who followed us sputtered with wrath. He was shocked. We, as a matter of fact, were enjoying it. We were sure that those three people were just what that table needed. (Bring on the caviar and the splitting turkey with its truffles, Mohammed!)

"This table," announced Mohammed to Mr. Hussein, "is set for DINNER!"

So all of us trailed into the living room where we had intended to go in the first place.

"Since *we* are Christians . . ." Hussein said to us, nodding sideways towards Mohammed, as if to say, "These poor misguided people . . ."

Mohammed left the room while Hussein and Mrs. Hussein and Miss Hussein sat down for a nice long visit. We cut the cake and gave a portion to each.

But Hussein wanted service.

"Boy!" he shouted grandly.

The "boy" came from the pantry.

"Boy, bring me a light!"

Hussein commanded and it was done. Mohammed held a match to Hussein's cigar. After that he called our attention again to our brotherhood, interrupting himself with a hic-cough. His wife sat silent, understanding nothing. The little girl shrank from it all. Hussein laughed, and then became serious.

"Boy!" he roared, this time for a glass of water. It may have been a hint for something stronger. Mohammed did his bidding.

The two cats who happened to be in the room were terrified at Hussein's laughter. They hid under the tree, reminding us that we had not shown it to the little girl. But she was too frightened to look. So we gave her another slice of cake.

Presently Mohammed came in with a stern air. He addressed Hussein.

"Mr. Hussein, you are wanted by Mr. Brooks Sahib at the Plant." Mohammed was a good boy.

Hussein rose and said how sorry he was, and that he would be back for his wife and daughter a little later.

We suspected that Hussein might forget where he had left his wife and child, and we excused ourselves since the dinner hour was near.

Besides their leaves, they took our knitting. But no one knew that until Mrs. Hussein was well out of the door. Mohammed had to untangle them, for they had caught one end of the yarn and unraveled the knitting as they walked. We could hear Hussein laughing about it, and in his deep voice he sang out:

"Since we are all Christians together!"

At this time we were beginning to get worried about the expiration of the marriage bans.

The time was drawing close.

We looked at the calendar and found that we had only three days left. In these three days it would be necessary to go up to Baghdad to be married.

The rain had timed itself so that for two weeks we had not been able to make the trip. During these two weeks there had been a few good days when traveling by road had been possible, but at that particular time an accident had happened at the River Plant that prevented us from leaving Brooksville.

Flying was impossible since the landing ground had been flooded ten days before. It had become part of a lake sixty miles long and four miles wide. (This lake had also cut the railway line to the *Wadi*, and work had been at a standstill for several days.) Now the lake had subsided but it left the landing ground a mud pie. By river the trip would have taken five or six days against the current.

After we studied the calendar, Douglas announced that if it did not rain during the next three days, the roads would be dry enough to make a try for Baghdad.

The next two days we watched the weather anxiously.

On the day before the expiration of the bans, a drying wind blew like a gale on the still wet roads. We watched for cars to confirm our hopes. No car had passed our house for a week.

At three o'clock in the afternoon Douglas came to our room where we were packing our bags. He was in very good spirits.

"If this wind keeps up I think we will be able to make it. The roads should be dry enough in six or seven hours. We could leave about midnight tonight and get to Baghdad in the morning just in time to clean up and get to the Consulate by ten—"

"God willing!"

"But would the police let us through?" Only one of us was

bright enough to think of this. "Certainly they will stop us at Kut."

"Please, Memsahib," said Mohammed, who was helping us, "roads very bad. No good going tonight. You will get stuck in the mud. You will be robbed. You will be killed."

Douglas looked at the bags we were packing.

"You are not taking a lot of bags, are you?" (It is the baggage again, we thought, always the baggage—and the night before the wedding, too.) "I should advise you, my dear, not to take too many, in the event that we have to abandon the car on the road."

Douglas poked his head out of the door to take another look at the weather. Then he disappeared.

It is a good thing, we thought, that he does not wait to hear what we want to say about the baggage.

That evening about six o'clock the wind changed. It began blowing from the South. That was a certain sign of rain. Even then we did not give up. Blackness piled up in the already black sky. But the rain did not come until about nine in the evening.

After a half-hour of pouring rain, the roads might just as well never have existed. They turned into slimy mud. Douglas announced that the trip would have to be abandoned. We could not have traveled even a hundred yards. We could not be married tomorrow.

The rain would continue for hours, he said.

It did. It rained heavily all night long and then gently for two days after that. . . .

A week later mail arrived from the South over the open desert route.

A car brought the mail sack as far as mile twelve on our railway line. There it was put on a loco and brought down to us.

Among the letters was one from the British Consulate in Basrah.

It was dated the day after the bans had expired. The Consul was obliged to inform us how sorry he was that he had not been able to give the Consul in Baghdad his authorization of our marriage, since, owing to the delay in the mails, he had only just received the copy of the divorce decree that very day.

After all, had we managed to get up to Baghdad, the trip would have been in vain.

It was another month before we were able to leave Brooksville to go up to Baghdad to put up the marriage bans a second time.

XXI

Mohammed Prepares to Marry

ONE DAY RIGHT AFTER the first of the year, Mohammed interrupted us in the studio where we were painting. We were working on a particularly impatient model. She was Yusef's wife. With every moment she was getting more and more fidgety and we were trying to get something done before she went completely on strike.

It was very cold in the studio and the unsuccessful fire sent all the smoke into the room instead of up the chimney. We could hardly see a yard ahead of us.

This was not the time to hear of a catastrophe in the kitchen or to be told that the geese had eaten up another bed of lettuce.

Since we had not shouted for Mohammed (we had to shout from the studio), we took it for granted that something had gone wrong.

He often came and disturbed us without being shouted for. Sometimes we almost felt that he had made things go wrong in order to keep life at the proper pitch of excitement and to give himself opportunities to disturb us. This subtle desire to annoy us, we sensed only vaguely, for he had a way of doing

it that we could not criticize. He could make it seem that he was only doing his duty in our interest, that he was being a perfect servant to report all difficulties and problems instantly.

Now he stood inside the door, waiting.

"What is it, Mohammed?" We were resigned to whatever was coming.

But when we looked up at him we saw that he was smiling the smile that meant, "I am in a good mood today."

Often when he was in this good mood he said, "We are all friends, Memsahib." And sometimes, during these agreeable periods, he had even gone so far as to say, "You must not talk to me like a servant, Memsahib. I am not the same as these others. I am different. You must talk to me like a friend. I do right by you and Mr. Brooks Sahib. I do not come one year and go the next. I stay always with you."

And now as he stood ready to be heard, his smile seemed to say all this over again.

"Memsahib, I have something to say to you."

"Yes, Mohammed. What *is* it?"

He looked down and began polishing the brass tray he carried, with the inevitable combination dishrag, duster, and handkerchief.

"Memsahib, I think I get married soon."

"Married, Mohammed?" Somehow this natural idea had never occurred to us. It presented a problem that might lead to unimagined complications.

"She is the daughter of Daud the Shopper, Memsahib." Daud had evidently been working on Mohammed with tales of the beauty of his daughter.

Then Mohammed asked, as a special favor, the temporary use of a room that was separate from the regular servants' quarters. It was at present a storeroom.

We were puzzled.

His old room, with the addition of a reed fence, could easily

be arranged as suitable and adequate quarters for a wife. This fence would form a yard and give his wife the necessary protection against male eyes. But no, Mohammed had made a special request.

The complications had begun.

We discarded the idea of going on with the work in hand. Painting was out of the question now, and anyway, the model had stretched herself, sighed, wiped her watery eyes and was edging her way out of the door.

Mohammed's request meant finding another storeroom for the boxes and trunks and cupboards that were kept there. And then there were all the odd household articles and the broken eggbeaters and old flatirons that would have to be sorted over.

(All these things should *really* be thrown out, we thought. We are getting just like the Arabs—we cannot throw anything away.)

We had visions of the new locks and knobs we would have to put on the doors of a new storeroom. *Where* would we get the locks? We had used the last one on the door of Henri's W.C. "Why don't you take them off my door and use them on the storeroom?" we could hear Henri saying. "Why don't you order some from Baghdad?" This from Douglas. Why don't we order the moon from Baghdad? It would be so easy . . . only a few letters to write and a few addresses to look up and then a few delays . . . and then the moon wrapped up in a brown paper parcel, very neatly wrapped, too . . . only when you opened up the parcel, it would turn out to be the sun instead . . . just a little mistake . . . very sorry indeed, madame.

And what about a carpenter to put on the locks and the doorknobs if we had them? "He cannot come to work for you today. I am sorry. He is making some repairs on the Plant—" Henri again. "My dear, I will see that you get a car-

penter from Ali Gharbi—if there is one—” from Douglas.

But the carpenter in Ali Gharbi will be building that new addition to the Qaim Maqqam's house. And after that Simon wants him to build a bathroom for him in Sheikh Saad. “But couldn't we have the carpenter for *only a few hours*, Henri?” A pleasant smile from Henri. “You know very well that once you get him, you will keep him here for days.” Of course Henri is right, for first of all the carpenter will forget his hammer and he will have to go back to Ali Gharbi to get it. That will take one whole day. And after that we will need him to plane off the swollen doors in the studio that won't close. And then that screen we ordered three weeks ago to shut off the cold draughts in the dining room—what about that?

But why all this fuss over locks? There are only four different designs of locks around here and four different keys to fit them, and everyone has one or two of these keys in his pocket—even the Latrine Boy. But still . . .

All these things flitted through our heads as we washed our brushes, cleaned up bits of paint here and there, and stood our canvases on the mantel to get a better look.

We did not get as far as mentally finding another storeroom itself, which was the main thing.

Mohammed was waiting. . . .

We wanted to say, “Mohammed, such a very little thing as a lock sounds so easy, but it really means so much activity in the getting, you know, Mohammed; and so many of these very little things clutter up our day. *Please* go away and let us wash our brushes in peace. *Please* don't get married, Mohammed, and start such problems going.”

But in spite of the complications we were curious to know why Mohammed must change his room temporarily.

“Why do you want another room just for this occasion? Why must it be the storeroom?”

Mohammed smiled pleasantly.

Then he wiped the dust off Boycat's ears with the same cloth he had used for the tray.

"Memsahib," he explained, "I am different from these others. I ask you for that room because it is far away from the servant houses. My Girl is young. She is thirteen. She is shy, Memsahib. I bring her here first night of the wedding. I do not want other servants, Yusef, 'Brahim, Motlog, to hear her cry out the first night."

When we heard this we decided to do what we could to help Mohammed and his bride.

The wedding took place in due course.

But for weeks before this occasion the painful preliminaries were ours as well as Mohammed's. We were consulted as to every step of the preparations.

We were even invited to come forth with financial advances to the amount of four *dinars* to help Mohammed pay for the future little bride. Our work was interrupted. We were inconvenienced.

It seemed that our lives were to be given over to getting Mohammed married off.

One day when Mohammed was showing us a sample of blue artificial silk as a possible choice for one of the dresses of the future bride, a telegram from Basrah arrived for us. It was from the English Judge who had been our host in Basrah. He said that he was on his way to Ali Gharbi to try a special murder case, and could we put him up for the night? He would arrive at four in the afternoon.

Great preparations made our day a busy one, for we were anxious to prove the statements we had made to the Judge about the Perfect Butler and our Genius of a Cook. We would show them off. Today the household we had organized would be a triumph for us.

The dinner we planned would have done credit to the Tour d'Argent or the Colony, had either of these restaurants thought of such a menu.

We had consulted together in secret. We had visited the kitchen any number of times. We had advised Yusef of the exact menu and we had given instructions at length to be sure that there was no chance of a misunderstanding. We repeated the order over and over to Yusef *not* to open any tinned food.

Perhaps we repeated it too many times, so that the words TINNED FOOD were all that he eventually remembered.

In the minds of these Indian cooks and Arab boys there exists a persistent and stubborn idea that anything in a tin is superior to the finest fresh foodstuffs. This conception is a hangover from wartime in Mesopotamia. And even now it is encouraged by the fact that tinned food in Iraq is expensive and fresh food is cheap.

By four o'clock in the afternoon everything was organized.

Every fire was neatly laid. The best linen made up the best bed for the traveler. Even our nails had been done in the palest of pink to harmonize with the color that these English consider to be in the best of taste. Surely a tired and hungry and thirst traveler would find our house a *perfect* oasis after a long and difficult journey!

By six o'clock we got restless. The guest had not arrived.

Of course, there were many things that might hold him up. The weather looked bad. It might have rained between here and Basrah. He might be stuck in the mud. . . . Or perhaps on these roads in the dark (we were always being warned) . . . suppose someone had a grudge against a court decision?

At six-thirty Simon came from the village of Ali Gharbi to say that he was afraid that the Judge would not be coming tonight. (After all this trouble!) Simon was probably right for somehow he always knew in advance what was and was not going to happen.

The whole village had been thrilled by the coming visit of the well-known and respected Judge. In fact our stock had gone up considerably among the villagers, when it was learned (from reading our telegram) that he was to stay at our house instead of the local resthouse used for government officials. Now if he did not arrive the whole village would be just as disappointed as we.

At seven o'clock Mohammed came to us and asked us for the evening off. We were painfully surprised and shocked that he could think of such a thing at such a time. And we were a little disappointed in Mohammed.

We were very firm. "No, Mohammed, we are sorry. You may not go."

At seven-thirty Mohammed came to us again. "Memsahib, excuse me, the guest not here. It is to pay the money for the Girl I go to Ali Gharbi."

"But not tonight, Mohammed. Tomorrow." (We hoped that he would not become sulky, so that if the Judge arrived after all, he would enjoy Mohammed's usual good service.)

At eight o'clock we were sure that our guest was not coming, and there was no reason to remain firm any longer in the case of Mohammed. He hurried off.

Fifteen minutes later the Judge arrived. He had been stuck on the road for several hours.

His car, driven by his Boy Kerim, was loaded down with bedding, suitcases, food, a case of Perrier, boxes of sweets, lemons and oranges, fresh bacon and a very fine cut of pork for roasting! A great treat for us, since pork did not exist nearer than Basrah.

Contrary to all custom, the Latrine Boy met the car at the gate. The whole staff was completely disorganized in celebration of an evening off for Mohammed. 'Brahim the Gardener and a miscellaneous group unloaded the car while we ushered the weary guest into our Perfect Household.

The hot water managed itself somehow, so that at least the bath proceeded without catastrophe. During this time we frantically sent out messengers after Mohammed, for we hoped that we might get him back in time to serve the dinner which we planned to postpone for an hour or so. When the messengers returned, they said that he had already crossed the river. The ferry would not cross again tonight. The Tigris was too rough with the high wind that was blowing.

After the guest appeared from his bath we tried to make up for what was lacking in the service by giving him refreshing drinks before dinner. After all, we thought, dinner is the most important part of the evening. He will always remember us by the dinner.

He did.

The menu we had planned was this:

Vichysoise Soup

Sole Frite (*fresh from the Tigris, but he did not answer to the name of sole*)

Roast Partridge

Pomme de Terre Mousseline

Salad (*fresh lettuce*)

American Lemon Meringue Pie

Savory of Sardines on Toast (*a last minute decision in order to please Douglas who liked his savory. It only meant opening a tin of sardines*)

Coffee

But the menu turned out to be this:

Bouillon (*made from English Bovril*)

Salmon (*fresh from the tin and garnished with wilted lettuce*)

Roast Pork (*the Judge's pork and only half done*)

Mealy Boiled Potatoes

Salad (*wilted lettuce*)

Tinned Peaches

No Savory (*it was forgotten*)

During the meat course the Judge remarked on what a *fine* dinner it was. We were surprised, since he was English, to hear him express enthusiasm (and such emphatic enthusiasm) about food. But he ate very little of it.

(We will have to go out, we thought, and find out what is the matter in the kitchen.)

So one of us choked on a boiled potato. . . .

A quick retreat into the kitchen revealed Yusef the Cook on the floor. He lay on his back in a stupor, practically dead drunk, with a bottle of *arak* beside him.

Kerim the Judge's Boy was working hard over the salad. After a moment Yusef opened his eyes and gave Kerim weary instructions about the amount of salt to put in the salad dressing.

"The Memsahibs like much of salt. . . ."

It was hardly the moment for the hostesses to act.

Dinner proceeded hurriedly.

We learned later what had happened. Yusef was very happy for Mohammed. He remembered his own lonely life before he had married. Now Mohammed would soon be as happy as Yusef. Something must be done about all this happiness.

Since Mohammed was not there to keep Yusef on the straight and narrow, Yusef proceeded in the only way he knew how—the way of *arak*—to celebrate Mohammed's first down payment on his future bride. . . .

The following morning after the Judge drove away Henri talked to us about Mohammed.

We opened our hearts about the whole affair and we talked

of last night's dinner. If Mohammed had been thinking of something besides his coming marriage, all this would not have happened.

"After a boy like Mohammed gets married," Henri warned us, "you may plan on only half-a-boy. He will never be as good as he was."

"But perhaps Mohammed is different. Maybe he will get over this."

Henri smiled. "You may as well be resigned. They are all the same. I have seen this sort of thing happen before in Iraq." But instead of a warning it was a kind of challenge to us. It occurred to us that perhaps the situation only required a little more patience on our parts. Certainly a boy as good as Mohammed could not forget his pride in his work, his interest in our household, and his repeated intentions to stay always with Memsahib and Mr. Brooks Sahib. After all, a better understanding of his problems might go a long way. Perhaps we had been too hard and demanding.

We decided to try out our new attitude.

For the next week everything went well. Life had never been smoother. Mohammed was again the Perfect Butler.

We congratulated ourselves on conquering a Situation; we had overcome the unpleasant and the inconvenient.

Then Things began again.

It was unfortunate that several more guests coincided with occasions that definitely required Mohammed's presence in the village. We were rattled, but we remembered our resolutions. We bravely smoothed over the rough spots in the service by scheming a little. When guests were present, buffet lunches and dinners took the place of table service. We explained to Douglas and Henri that a bit of inconvenience was to be expected at a serious time like this.

We consoled ourselves by looking forward to the time when

it would all be over, the marriage an accomplished fact, and Mohammed living a normal life again.

But alas, that time of peace never came.

The months following the marriage were just the same as the months preceding it. Mohammed's troubles were still ours but ours were not his. For the duration of his service with us, we were to live according to the state of Mohammed's private life. When he was sad, our household became hectic; when he was glad, life was very smooth indeed.

XXII

Mohammed's Own Story of His Wedding

NEEDLESS TO SAY, FOR a long time after Mohammed was married, we did not speak of the subject of the marriage unless Mohammed brought it up first. And when he did, we always had something very pressing to do at that time.

So it was not until many months later that we finally learned the details of the wedding of Mohammed. By that time we had turned him over to a friend in Baghdad. The change had done him good.

During a visit we made to this house, both of us developed fevers that kept us in our room. Mohammed offered to sweep up himself, though that was not his task. He explained that the dust was very bad for us when we had fevers and that, since only *he* knew how to keep the dust from rising into the air when he swept, he preferred doing the job himself.

He worked very efficiently and quietly. The sweeping was perfectly done. Then the dusting of the table tops and chairs began. In Iraq, a flick and a snap of the dustcloth does the job. All the quiet, settled dust leaps into the air and changes places with the rest of the settled dust that has also been

flicked and snapped at. Mohammed was no different in his dusting technique from the other house boys.

As we watched the work progress, we were reminded of our own house when Mohammed was with us. We remembered Mohammed's marriage. And we asked him about it.

So as he worked he told us the whole story with details. Some of these details may sound a bit indelicate to people who have never lived in an Eastern country, but it is difficult not to treat Mohammed's story frankly.

Among these people with whom we lived the results of the wedding night are of vital interest, especially to close friends and relatives of the couple. This curiosity about what happens to the bride and groom is perfectly natural and frank. It is as natural as asking a friend, who has just returned from a long journey, whether he has had a good time. In the case of the wedding, as in the case of a trip, it would be bad manners to ignore the situation.

In many ways the Arab rules of conduct are perhaps stricter than ours. But when the crucial moment arrives, no one has any false modesty and everyone concerned waits eagerly for the consummation of the marriage. This may take a very short or a very long time, and the man is judged accordingly. The girl is judged by the evidence of her virginity at the time of her marriage. Friends gather outside the nuptial room. If the news of the girl's virtue is good, everyone rejoices with the bride and groom. If the news is tragic, then everyone is sad.

Here is the story of Mohammed's marriage in his own words:

I go with that Daud to the village. We go to his house and I see that girl.

Only she sit in a window, and I should not see her. Her face covered with veil. She see me but she do not speak.

Next day her mother talk to Daud about me: "That fellow is very nice. He is smart-looking."

I have on my best suit.

A month pass. I fix it with Daud and her mother. Mother say, "All right, I give her to Mohammed. She love Mohammed. Mohammed love her. Go tell Mohammed."

My friends come to me and say, "Give ten *dinars* to her mother."

So I borrow ten *dinars* from Simon.

Next night my friends celebrate. Girl's mother buy hundred handkerchiefs and put sugar into them. It is paid out of my ten *dinars*. At girl's house my friends and her friends sit and each get handkerchief and sugar and glass of sherbet.

After that I get four people witnesses. They listen to all I say. Girl gets four people witnesses. They all go to *Seyyid* and tell him. If anything wrong after I marry her these people go to government and tell what I say and what she say before.

A week after that, the marriage. I go to a girl's house and we all go to judge. He say, "Mohammed, you take that girl? You pay ten *dinars* to her family?" I say, "Yes." He say, "If you chuck her you pay five *dinars* more?" I say, "Yes." He put that down in book. The marriage, it is done.

Daud say, "When you come get girl, Mohammed?"

I say I come after a week for her.

So girl get ready. She has seven dresses fixed, some silk, some blue, some pink. I pick the colors and the cloth. She know nothing. She is country girl. She is not good enough for me. My family live in Baghdad. They say this girl is not good enough.

Girl's mother takes ten *dinars* to bazaars. She buys mattress, blanket, and pillows with silk on them. And a box for girl's dresses. And cook pans and silver things for girl's hands and feet.



She say things cost all the ten *dinars*, but I know she keep five for herself. All the stuff is not worth two *dinars*.

In the morning, week after marriage, girl go to the bath. Four friends go with her. One cleans her here, one cleans her there.

She put on clean dress of pink silk. At her house they have music and drums and gramophones. Big lady of town come at four o'clock to see girl and clean her face with powder and piece of string. With string she take off hairs on her face. She put henna on girl's lips and feet and fingers.

Six o'clock I go for her. Everybody comes back across river with us. They carry all the girl's things. Girl's mother put girl into my room. I go to Jassim's coffee shop. When I come back to my room with my friends, girl is sitting with her mother and her sister. Then everybody go leave us alone. Girl's face is covered with veil. She do not like me to see her.

I say, "Come here!"

She say, "No."

I hang my dress up, special long dress for wedding. I sit on carpet and smoke cigarette. I call her again.

She come sit with me. I touch her hand, but she do not open her face. She say no all the time. It is seven o'clock.

I sit still. I got long knife in my hand. I put it down beside me. I tell her, "Come on, open your face!"

I get up. I hit her. Pull the knife. She gets the wind up. After while she open her face. We talk, sit down and smoke together. She go to bed. But she says not to come near her. I hit her again.

Then she lie with me in the bed. She do not let me take her. She say she is young and she cry. But she is thirteen years. I am good to her. I am not like these others.

At seven in morning my friends come to see me, to kiss me, to shake hands. They say, "Good luck to you!"

Still I am not married to her yet. I did not take her yet. I go to coffeehouse with my friends. Her mother and sister and many ladies come see girl.

One lady tell her, "You are silly. You should give yourself to your husband." Girl cries. All the ladies sit in front of her and tell her things and teach her. They say, "Mohammed is a fine man."

When I come back at noon she is alone. I say, "I will go away. I think someone been touching you before. People say bad things. You are afraid."

She gets mad. I know what she think about. She come to me and kiss me. She say all right. I take her. All signs are good.

Everyone is glad. After that she loves me.

At first everything go fine. I make her keep room clean. I make her take bath every day. I do not want her dirty like the others. I am good to her. But I keep her afraid. I beat her. That is good for her. But her mother make trouble. Her mouth always open. "Mohammed no good," she say. One day she comes when I am away, and takes girl and all her things.

I have no luck.

Weeks go on and I can't get girl. They think I am a fool. They think I pay more money to get her back. She is not good enough for me. I do not want her. But one day I get her back for three *dinars*. I keep her for two months. Her mother make trouble again. It is enough. I send girl back. She say I must give her money every month. But I do not pay. I go to Baghdad. I do not even write. One time I come back to Brooksville and girl's mother comes to see me.

She say, "You do not write a letter to your wife."

"No, I do not want her now."

"We do not want you, too."

I fetch witnesses from coffee shop. "Listen to what she say," I tell them. They listen. Then I say, "I want back all stuff you buy with my ten *dinars*. I want it back before I chuck her. You listen everybody?"

Her mother say, "We do not want Mohammed. Nothing in front. Nothing behind. If she get child we will kill it. There is no name for it."

We go to judge. I pay girl's mother the five *dinars* written in the book.

I never see girl again.

XXIII

Moharram in Mesopotamia

WE WERE SITTING IN A small village on the banks of the Tigris.

The sky was dull and sad over the desert. The river, angry and swift, roared in flood. It had risen eighteen feet during the night in its last spree of spring energy.

Though Brooksville was only twenty-five miles away, we seemed in a world removed.

We were on our way to Baghdad. Since there was no taxi to be had, we had taken two seats in a native car, and the car had got stuck in the mud two miles below us where the Tigris had overflowed the bunds. We had been brought back to this village and left here to wait. It would be more comfortable here than sitting in the mud near the car, Simon thought. For Simon was also traveling to Baghdad in the same car. Now, from the village, he had collected a few Arabs with their long-handled shovels, and he had taken them to help dig out the car.

In two days' time Douglas was to follow us to Baghdad. He had wired the Consulate to make an appointment for the wedding.

But now we sat wondering how long we would have to wait on Yusef Beg's front porch. We were expected in Baghdad the same evening, for we had already accepted an invitation to go to an Iraqi party. It would be too bad to miss the party for it promised to be interesting.

Yusef Beg was the chief of this village. His small mud house, with its outside stairway leading to the roof, stood out from the rest of the mud huts. From the road it had always appealed to us as an especially worthy subject for an architectural photograph because of its simplicity of line and good proportions. Its only decorations were its royal-blue doors and window frames. But now that we were on the porch of the house (really a low terrace) we were too close to see its distant attractions. It seemed shabby and dull like the day.

At first there was no one around us. The village was empty and deserted, but suddenly we were not alone. Dogs had come up to sniff and bark. Men of the village gathered to stare at us. They whispered about us. They sat down on the ground in a circle and discussed matters that called for gestures in our directions. They grew excited. There seemed to be some argument. We understood only a word here and there for they talked quickly.

This was the tenth day of Moharram, a festival set aside for religious devotion. This was a day of tears.

Husain, beloved by the Shiah Moslems, grandson of the prophet, was murdered twelve hundred years ago. Husain was the son of Ali, whose line the Shiah sect of Moham-medans believe to be the only rightful heirs to the Caliphate. Each year, ever since the tragedy of the murder, the Shiah heart is filled with weeping on this day. Plays are acted out with every detail of the betrayal and killing of Husain and his small band of relatives and followers on the open desert near Kerbala. Processions carry the supposed corpse of Husain (a man covered with a bloody sheet) through the streets.

During these processions men beat themselves with chains and cut themselves with swords. Blood flows as it did near Kerbala so long ago.

We had been warned not to go to Ali Gharbi during these days of religious fury and sorrow, the last three days of Moharram. The authorities do what they can to stop these exhibitions, but it is difficult to stifle an ancient emotion that rolls like a wave over the entire Shiah world at this time. It would be just as well, we were told, not to annoy the devotees with our Christian presence and our curiosity.

And on this day we realized that we were in a very lonely spot.

We wished that the car had not been stuck in such a remote place, or that we had traveled on a less significant day when emotions did not run so high. Why were there so few men in the village and no women to be seen at all? Where were the women?

"Suppose that there are rites and ceremonies on this day that we know nothing about? Some ancient sacrifices or something?" one of us asked the other.

"Don't be ridiculous!"

But the descriptions of religious frenzies that we had heard began to be elaborated and exaggerated in our own minds. There were occasional casualties and accidents after Moharram. That was the reason the authorities forbade these public demonstrations.

We watched nervously for a sign of change in the attitude of the men around us.

If only the car could be pulled out of the mud soon! But even if it appeared in time to go on today toward Baghdad, in what sort of condition would we find the roads for the rest of the way? Beyond Kut we knew that they were open. But this side of Kut we would certainly get stuck again.

There was no communication from this small village. We

might be here for days before we could get word to Brooksville.

Why, we wondered, had we taken no food with us this time? We were usually so careful about provisions. We always carried a few tins of sardines or bully beef, a loaf of bread, and a bottle or two of water. But now we had no food at all with us and only one bottle of water. And that was in the car, and had probably been lost by this time.

Brooksville water would have tasted very good as we sat listening for Arabic words that we could understand. (Here it is, the word *el shatt* for river and then the word *Brooks!* They are going to throw us in the river!)

Then finally someone said, "*Bàzaxin*" (cats). Why, of course, they had known all along who we were! Suddenly that one word put us at our ease and brought back our courage and restored our good sense.

When these men felt that we were more relaxed and sympathetic, they began to talk to us. Then they tried to amuse us by staging a war against a rat that had taken refuge from the river and was scurrying between holes near where we sat.

Finally after we had been waiting for four hours, the car appeared on the road, triumphant but covered with mud.

It was still a long way to Baghdad. . . .

Half an hour of slow going and then we had a puncture. When that was fixed, the motor stalled.

At a little Arab café, just across the Tigris from a small village, the driver stopped. He asked about the roads. It seemed that several cars had been through since yesterday, but our driver was afraid he could not make it with his car. We would find ourselves somewhere on the road where there would be no tea, he said!

Simon asked a lift of an army car that was starting for Baghdad, and its driver took pity on us. We transferred our bags and went with him.

We suggested to Simon that we could find a taxi at Kut. But Simon conferred with the driver and we drove right through the town.

After dark we met up with two other cars on their way to Baghdad, an army car and a Chevrolet from Kut that Simon knew. We made a caravan and followed each other's wheel tracks in the mud as if we were chasing the car ahead. After every bad spot of the road, we would stop and wait to see that the others were coming behind.

And then without warning, the car from Kut turned over in an irrigation ditch.

One of the men in the overturned car had hurt his leg, but not badly. We took two of the passengers in with us and the other car took the rest. We abandoned the damaged Chevrolet.

A great detour took us miles to the left, over unbelievably bad tracks. And there, somewhere along the way, we lost the other car.

At the end of the bad piece we stopped and waited. What had happened? We all got out and stood in the mud and stretched a little. We listened, but there was not a sound. (What *was* it, we thought, that we read in the paper only the other day? About bandits. "A convoy of four motor cars was held up . . . by bandits . . . near Kut." How far are we from Kut now? ". . . passengers being relieved of all their valuables and in some cases suffering ill treatment. . . . Police cars . . . promptly rushed to the scene . . . all the robbers were arrested." *Good work!*)

Suddenly in the quiet of the night we heard the distant sound of horses galloping toward us.

It's going to happen, we thought. What a *wonderful* night for a robbery!

Then out of the blackness two *mounted police* drew up.
"*Salam alekum.*"

We answered all together, laughing our relief quietly to ourselves.

"Are you all right?" they asked.

The sounds of words and the heavy breathing of the horses had a clear, precious quality as they were thrown into this night emptiness.

The police explained that from their lonely posts they had seen our headlights, and when they saw us stop they thought that something might be the matter. At this end of the road these mounted police are stationed at frequent intervals to make the road safe for travelers. They waited and talked to us until the other car, which had had a little engine trouble, joined us. Then they rode off to take up their watches again.

When we saw the lights of Baghdad, it was nine o'clock. The two men in our car got out at a café before we reached Baghdad itself. We had been on the road for twelve hours, though the distance we had traveled was less than two hundred miles. We had eaten nothing. It was a relief to be in the city at last.

Simon explained that he had saved us a great deal of money by traveling like this in an army car. (He always watched our expenses as if he were personally responsible for every *fil* we paid out.) Instead of twelve dollars for a taxi, the three of us had made the trip for three dollars.

We were shockingly late for the party that night.

But not too late. In an electrically-lighted garden (carpeted with Persian rugs) were tables of food waiting to be eaten, and the hosts and guests standing around these tables eager to begin.

In a few minutes our fingers dripped with the curry-flavored roast fish that we scooped off its backbone. Balls of rice were molded for us by friendly hands and offered like

gems. Piles of *kubz* would be used to sop up the grease on our fingers afterward.

After our day of fasting, buttermilk in great bowls tasted fresh and bitter. Pickled and stuffed eggplants, tied up decoratively with strips of palm leaves, were as beautiful in the hands of the Turkish dancers as gardenias in Marlene Dietrich's manicured fingers.

Chickens and cheeses clamored for our attentions, while the fruits and sweet syrupy cakes we could easily abstain from.

Finally, after washing our hands in the fountain, we sat back in velvet-upholstered "living room sets" (though there was no roof over our heads) to listen to the music of the Turks (or were they Armenians?), trying to remember that we were not in a garden of the Caliph's City, but that our hosts were modern Iraqis whose careers called them to Europe on frequent visits.

There was much amusement because no one could tell one of us from the other. Which one, they asked, was to be married, and how did we tell ourselves apart? (Each time this question is asked, and that is often, we sigh, and hope that it will be the last time. But we have no luck.)

We asked the Turks to sing for us an Arab song that went like this (in our own spelling):

"Baladiyeh, baladiyeh. . . .

Wen ah bedouii rawa'ha baladiyeh. . . ."

We sang it as we remembered it. We had first heard it on a lonely road in Syria when a little gypsy girl sang and danced it for us. She had danced wickedly. After many such songs, while her desperado father played for her, she had suddenly turned imp, and, smirking at us, had ended her song surprisingly with "Yes, sir, that's my Baby!" and a final step of the Charleston.

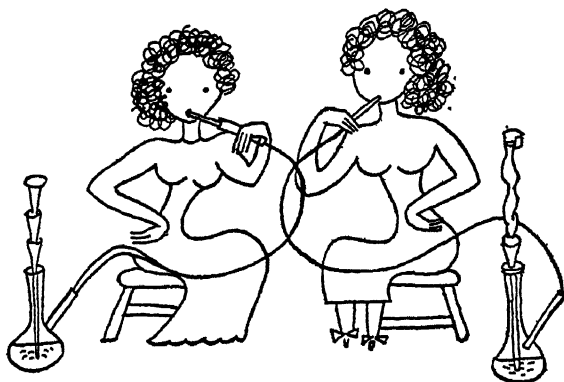
The Turkish singers recognized our curious rendering of

the *Baladiyeh* song, and they went into verse after verse in their nasal, oriental voices that become so fascinating when you are used to them. As each girl sang she did a sort of modified stomach dance that was neither well nor badly done, but better than the gypsies.

One of our hosts, head of the Iraqi Air Force, translated the words of the song to us, and between verses he told us how to prepare some of the dishes that we had so obviously liked. Our other host, a famous general, showed us his collection of fancy-bred chickens that he kept in this garden. They blinked stupidly at us from their cages that lined one side of a rose path.

Music and flashlight photos finished the evening. We drove through the quiet streets of the City of the Arabian Nights in a Chrysler.

It was much more like the old Baghdad than we realized. Within eighteen months both of our hosts were killed as a result of their political ambitions for power.



XXIV

Marriage in Mesopotamia

AS DOUGLAS ARRIVED only a few hours late the wedding took place at the appointed time.

It happened to be the busiest moment of the day at the Consulate. As we stood in the office with a few friends, listening to very solemn words, the regular business of the Consulate was going on. We could hear it through the open door. Bells were rung somewhere not far off and people were hurrying back and forth in the passage. Building was going on in the court and we could hear the hammering of the workmen. But we refused to be disturbed by such mundane matters. After all we were glad that a *third* set of bans would not be necessary.

The wedding ring had presented a problem.

We knew that there would not be time in Baghdad to order a ring made. Douglas had suggested that we might find something that would do temporarily and, on a later trip to Europe sometime, we could replace it. But this idea did not appeal.

And then one day several months before the wedding, we

had seen a strange group in conference in the kitchen yard just before lunch. We were watching from the dining room where we were arranging flowers. Mohammed in his white and immaculate suit was talking excitedly to two men we had never seen before. They might have walked right out of a Bible picture of John the Baptist that we had been presented with long ago in Sunday School. Even from where we were we could see that their faces were long and fine and that their beards were dark against their kind and holy faces.

They were quiet and dignified. It was Mohammed who was excited. He waved and flicked his dishcloth in the air as he gestured. Then he called out an angry order to Kowkub who had stopped her washing to listen to what was going on.

'Brahim had drawn up to the edge of the little circle, too. His red-dyed beard was wagging approval at Mohammed, and from time to time he contributed a word to the argument. On the outside of the circle stood the open-mouthed Latrine Boy, with the Gazelle pulling unnoticed at his leash toward a young palm tree. Over his rags the Latrine Boy wore a strange white garment, obviously made from the end of a bolt of cloth with the stamp still on it. We could read the words BOMBAY SHEETING in large letters across his back.

The argument went on for nearly five minutes, and then Mohammed suddenly threw something (we couldn't see what it was) at the two strange men. Then he turned on his heel and came toward the kitchen.

We sauntered into the kitchen, as if we were going to look at a cake in the oven.

"Who were those men, Mohammed?"

He was all smiles and showed no evidence of any anger at all.

"Memsahib, I have no luck."

"What is the matter, Mohammed?"

"They think I am a fool. But I fix them. They gave me the lie. A week ago I ask them to get me gold. They bring me a Turkish pound, very old. Good! Then I ask them to make ring from the gold. Today they bring ring not made from this gold."

"So you threw it in their faces?"

"Tomorrow they will bring me very good ring. You will see, Memsahib."

"Who are these men?"

"We call them Subbi, Memsahib. They come from Amarah. They are different, Memsahib."

We found out that they belonged to a small and exclusive group, sometimes called Christians of Saint John, though their religion is not Christian. They all claim descent from John the Baptist. These people live a separate life with their own language and script, and are noted for their skill in silver, the designs for which they execute in black antimony on the metal.

The day after the argument in the kitchen, Mohammed's ring was delivered by the two workers. Mohammed showed us the workmanship and the smooth finish of the ring.

The problem of the wedding ring was solved.

We asked these two men to get for us another old Turkish pound. We gave them an earring to copy which we had often slipped on our fingers and thought would make a good ring. It was an impressive design in the shape of a wide band which was about three-quarters of an inch at the widest point and tapered to almost nothing on the inside of the hand.

The earring had come from Woolworth's in America.

If the resulting wedding ring ever appears in a fashion magazine, the description will read: "Ring from descendants of John the Baptist, made from Turkish gold piece, designed by Woolworth. Moderately priced at \$7.00."

After the wedding breakfast under the eucalyptus trees in a garden facing the Tigris, we went to the bazaars to do a little shopping. Douglas had appointments concerning new construction projects which would keep him until noon.

We planned on leaving Baghdad at twelve-thirty for Brooksville, for we had agreed that at this time we preferred Brooksville to Baghdad. And besides the weather looked threatening. If we waited, anything might happen to the weather in a day or two, and it might be a week before we could get to Brooksville at all. Even a half hour might make a difference in getting through. We heard rumors that it was raining in the South and that the river had risen again.

We started just a little after the agreed time.

At the filling station on the outskirts of Baghdad a car had just arrived from the South. The driver said that if we made good time to Kut we would still be able to make Brooksville, though the water was rising fast.

As we drove along under a heavy sky Douglas told us about the conference. A Sheikh, one of the most powerful still existing in the Near East, was present at the meeting. At noon he excused himself and got up from his chair, an imposing figure in his great brown *abba*, for he was exceptionally tall. The discussion stopped while he went to the corner of the office and knelt in his midday prayer. It was an impressive gesture.

We made fairly good time as far as Kut.

There we decided to take the desert track that ran between the river and the mountains. This route was sometimes open when the main road close to the river was closed. Now it was our only chance to get through, since we were told the Tigris had overflowed the bunds in another place below Kut.

To begin with the track was hard to find, since no one had used it for a long time. In order to get to it we had to cut across irrigation ditches where mud lay deep in the hollows. At each ditch we were obliged to make a dash for it, duck

our heads, and hope that no damage would be done to the car. It became a kind of game to see how many ditches we could cross before we were stuck; and it meant a lot of zig-zag miles to make any progress at all.

Finally we found the track, showing faint in the spring grasses.

Almost immediately we lost it again. We had only about an hour of light left, and it was most important not to delay.

We followed what we thought might be the track we were looking for, and very soon we came to a small Bedouin encampment. Men came out of the black tents; they seemed very surprised to see us on this track and they shook their heads discouragingly when we called out to tell them where we were going.

But one of them came over to the car and became interested in our plight.

"Are we on the right track?" we asked.

"No, it is over there," pointing.

"Do you know the route?"

"Yes, I myself will guide you. I alone know how to cross the places where the water has come down in great rivers from the mountains."

"Do you think we can get through?"

"We will get through, *in sha Allah*."

The Bedouin hung on the running board and pointed out the way. When we came to the first river, he guided us along the edge of the rushing waters while he tried to find the best place to cross. Then he jumped off the car and started to wade across. We expected to see him slip and be washed down into the swift stream. But he made it, and from the other bank he motioned to us that the going was firm enough for the car.

We crossed two or three streams but we had to retrace much of the distance we had covered in order to find patches of ground that were dry enough to run on. Finally the

Bedouin got discouraged and left us. He did not seem worried over how he was to get back to his camp.

Then in the distance we noticed another car on the desert behind us.

As it overtook us, the passengers motioned to us to stop. They told us that they had been following our fresh tracks ever since we turned off the main road. There were five Arabs in the car. Strapped to the running board and the trunk rack were three deck chairs, a folding cot, and great bundles wrapped in tarpaulins.

We wondered where they came from and why they had left some peaceful house to venture forth in such weather. They probably wondered the same about us.

We formed a team and drove along together over worse and worse ground. We consulted about the wet stretches to be avoided and the direction to be taken.

But it seemed to be Douglas's opinion that the others relied on.

Dusk was already settling down on the desert. We could no longer see the mountains. In fifteen minutes it would be totally dark.

Though we were only about fifteen miles from Brooksville, we would never be able to find our way over this ground in the night. On the other hand if we did not turn around at once we would not be able to find our track back the way we had come. A night on the desert would be dangerous. We did not know the local Bedouins.

We made one last dash through a very slimy patch, afraid to stop once we got into it. The other car followed us but they honked in distress and then they stopped. The further we went the worse it became. There was no use going on. Finally we turned around and went back to the other car.

"Don't go on without us!" one of them begged. "We cannot go through this mud with our load."

"It would be mad to spend the night on the desert," said another. "We would be robbed or worse!"

"Let us turn around and go back the way we came!" suggested a third.

Back to where? we wondered.

Douglas said that Yusef Beg's village was not far, once we reached the main road. There we could stay the night in the car under his protection.

It was defeat. After all this effort we were not to reach Brooksville that night. And as the road was cut from Yusef Beg's to Brooksville we might not even get home tomorrow, unless we hailed a passing tug. But could we board a passing tug? If the river were too swift it was doubtful whether boats could pull up to the shore at that point.

Once we had made up our minds to a night on the road, the idea seemed less forbidding. We retraced our difficult way, and when we arrived at Yusef Beg's village, he verified the rumor that the road to Brooksville was cut. The Tigris was flooding the entire section. His whole village, men and women, were occupied in fighting the flood and building up the bunds as fast as the river washed over them.

He could not even offer us the usual hospitality of tea and food, since there was no one in the village who was free to attend to us. He offered us his house, but we preferred to sleep in the car.

We prepared for our supper by washing our hands and faces in the overflow canal, and then we drank from it, for we had very little drinking water left. By the light of the stars and the headlights and two flashlights we stood beside the car and ate our supper. We had a lovely meal with beer as a reward for our hard day. The cheese and bread which we had bought at Kut, together with ham, a tin of bully beef, and fruit, made a fine wedding supper.



If it had not been for the mosquitoes, the night would have been quite perfect, though we had to sit up in the car.

In the morning the grayness was discouraging, and we were stiff with the cold. For breakfast we ate the left-over bread and fruit, which we shared with our five Arab companions of the night before.

They decided to go back to Kut, while we waited until the sun had come up to make our plans.

Then Yusef Beg came to talk to us and find out if he could help. We asked about the river and whether it was possible for a boat to pick us up at this point. He did not know when to expect one, but Douglas figured out that a tug should pass that morning. But by the time it could see our signal, it would be impossible for it to stop in this current.

An hour later the *Tewfic* passed, going upstream.

We all stood on the bank, and Douglas waved and shouted the message. The tug was close enough to understand. The

Tewfic would inform the tug that was coming downstream to stop here for us.

We boarded the downstream tug like immigrants with our packs on our backs, while Douglas and the villagers (who had ceased their shoveling for the moment) carried our cases.

Two hours later we sailed right over the top of what had been our lovely front lawn and proceeded to stop there. Everything was under water. We would have been flooded right up to the mud walls of the house had not an emergency bund been thrown up.

There on the top of the bund were Boycat and Girlcat crying out a welcome to us.

The first thing that we learned was that the office at the Plant had caved right into the river.

For four weeks the abandoned car stayed in Yusef Beg's village.

XXV

Camel Raid

THE DAYS OF SUMMER

were very much alike at Brooksville.

They commenced in April and went on into November. The sky was cloudless during these months, and the sun was an enemy instead of a friend. At noon when we went from the studio to the main house (a walk of fifty feet) we were obliged to wear our sun helmets. Blasts of heat came at us, suffocating us; and the reflected heat that rose from the graveled walks was like a stifling cloud.

Between the hours of nine and six we seldom left the shelter of the studio except at noon, and the cats knew enough to do likewise.

The temperature in the shade ranged from a hundred to a hundred and twenty-five degrees.

At night, if there was a breeze, we slept on the roof, but otherwise it was better to sleep indoors with fans playing on the bed. Because the early mornings were quite delightful and refreshing, we got up at four or five, and it was then that we rode or walked or worked, and gathered courage for the coming day.

Though we had the comfort of electric fans and refrigeration through this summer, the heat seemed intolerable.

We heard that the Babylonians had used a sort of air-cooling system, and we set up a modern application of it. We built lattice work on the dining room window openings, covered these with a thick coating of dried desert thorn, and then during the meal had a boy throw pails of water onto the covering. Then on the window sill we put an electric fan that blew the water-cooled air into the room. This system helped a lot. Of course the Babylonians had no electric fans, but slaves served the same purpose.

During those hot summer months, iced drinks gave only a momentary relief. Even though lovely cubes of coldness were constantly being made in the electric icebox, we could not have unending lemon squashes at our beck and call. Five or six shower baths during the hottest part of the day, and a change of clothes every few hours, helped the situation a little. But nothing soothed the prickly heat that irritated us.

Fevers and colds came, people said, from temperature changes. It seemed reasonable enough, for it was a surprising shock when one stepped out from a cooled room (over a hundred degrees) into the boiling sun. We had had better luck with colds the year before when we had no fans.

The sand flies brought a certain fever that was not serious but so uncomfortable and nerve-racking that we fled to Baghdad once or twice for a change. But there the rooms were so stuffy in the hotel that we longed only to get back to Brooksville.

We had escaped the horrible Baghdad boil with which many Europeans suffer. But Henri was not so lucky. He was just finishing the customary year's siege. Though many doctors have made a study of this boil, its cause has not been discovered.

The first summer had not seemed so bad when everything

was new to us. But the second called for all the patience that we were capable of. We were finding out what "life in the blue," as the British call it, could mean. We understood then why most European women in the East leave for cooler climates in the hot months. The Englishman, however, usually stays on except for leaves that come every two or three years. If his work is in the city in an official capacity, then his summer office hours are from early morning to two in the afternoon, when he is usually through for the day. But if he is on his own, like Douglas who was under contract to complete certain work by a certain time, then he is forced to work regardless of season.

We wondered how Douglas and Henri could stand the strain, day by day during the six months of summer.

We lived only for the evenings, when the sun went down.

Then everyone went outside. 'Brahim and his assistants sprinkled the gravel walks with water that steamed up from the hot paths. The cats and a new family of kittens stretched themselves listlessly or walked around, perking up as they gradually wakened. They found the green grass and rolled in it and ate bits that seemed good to them. The *Wowi* came out from his hiding place to scamper around, galloping in circles and drinking the good Tigris water.

The evenings were bearable because of the slight drop in temperature. We walked about and made tours of the garden to see that things were in order. We threw grain to the geese and let the Gazelle graze. Or we watched whatever boat life there was at the moment on the Tigris.

During this second summer our before-dinner-hour became an even more pleasant time of day than it had been the year before. We could choose new spots to sit in, where the foliage that we had planted had grown up with surprising speed. Some places were almost park-like. If we sat on the river's edge for our cold drinks and appetizers, the breeze rustled

through the new young leaves. If we chose a corner in the garden, then there was the different sound as the palm leaves flopped one against another. Everything took on an enchanted air at this time in the evening. As we sat around a table and the ice tinkled in our glasses, we could never believe the day that we had lived through. We could see only the little fire of Henri's cigarette and the glow of Douglas's pipe. Their voices would come from the darkness telling us things that had happened during their day that might interest us.

One evening they told us about the proposed camel raid.

A coolie had come to Simon that morning to beg him not to go to the *Wadi* that day with the semi-monthly pay for the men up there. The coolie said that everyone at Jassim's café knew that there was a plot on foot, hatched by some tribe to the South, to waylay the car and raid it. Simon went to Douglas, who was to go up with him this time, and told him what the man had said.

Douglas laughed and replied that an idle rumor would not stop them from going as planned.

As Douglas talked in the darkness, we imagined hundreds of camels and warriors and *dinar* notes flying in the wind, and, finally, Douglas murdered and left on the desert. Although we knew that raiding, in a Bedouin's eyes, is an honorable occupation, we could not see any reason for giving them a chance to succeed.

We pleaded with Douglas not to start until he had more information, but he only laughed at us.

The next morning after Douglas and Henri left the house, we climbed to the roof with the field glasses. We wanted to see these robbers with our own eyes. Douglas had said over marmalade and toast that he would go up to the *Wadi*, raid or no raid, but through the glasses we saw nothing at all on the desert horizon.

At noon we went up again, braving the glare of the sun.

Mohammed who went up with us swore that the specks that waved in the glasses, way out in the distance, were the raiders on their camels. (He was looking only with his naked eye.)

We sent Mohammed over to the Plant to investigate. He came back to us with a story which he told in a voice that had in it all respect for peril and risk.

"Mr. Brooks Sahib drive to *Wadi* alone!" he said with a tragic air.

"And—?"

"When Mr. Brooks Sahib ready to go, man come crying. He say Allah know he tell the truth!"

"What man said that?"

"Same man of yesterday. But Mr. Brooks Sahib drive off like this." And Mohammed threw out his chest and put on what he thought looked like a brave air.

"Mr. Brooks Sahib fine man!" said Mohammed. And he picked up Boycat and went back to his work.

That night we heard the story of what had happened.

First, Douglas said, he had left the pay roll in the office safe.

He had driven out toward the *Wadi*, and when he saw small specks on the horizon, about ten miles out, he swerved South to see what was up. In a short time he saw a dozen camel riders coming toward him in the distance. He made straight for them at full speed. Then when he was quite close he began to circle round them, closing in gradually on the surprised group. As he drove, he leaned out of the car and shouted. He kept this up until suddenly, without any warning, he turned in and drove straight toward their camels' faces.

The riders were puzzled and excited at this extraordinary procedure and the continuous shouting. They pulled up their camels. The motor car looked as if it were going to go right through them. Douglas slammed on the brakes and came to a stop just in front of the camels and their riders.

"What are you doing here?" demanded Douglas.

"We are moving camp to Bagh Shai, *in sha Allah!*" they answered in some confusion.

But there were no pack camels or donkeys or women folk, the things that always accompany a change in camp sites.

"Where do you come from?" asked Douglas.

"We come," they said, "from the Desert of Duwairiz."

Douglas turned and drove on in the direction of the *Wadi*, while the camel riders took the direction of Bagh Shai.

When he arrived at the *Wadi*, Douglas asked if anything had happened that was unusual.

"Something unusual?"

"Yes, any strangers around?"

"Oh, yes, yes, just a little minor robbery in the night. Some old clothes stolen, and a few shots . . . but nothing serious!"

As we listened we thought the robbers were rather a poor lot.

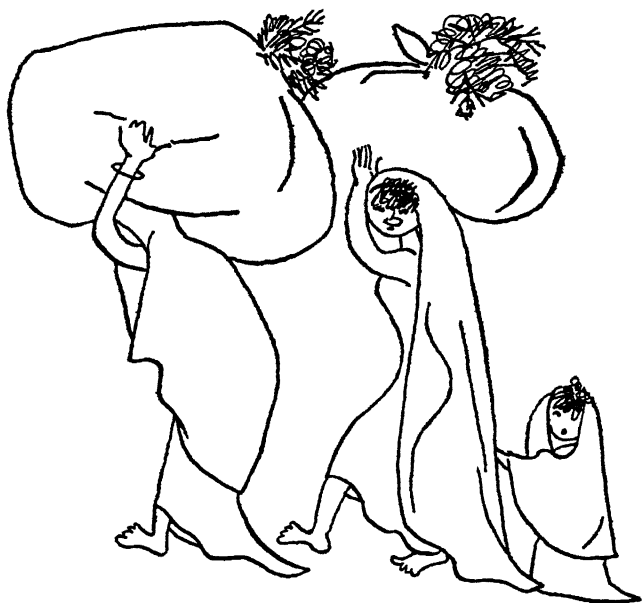
A little less dramatic were the ordinary, everyday raids on our property close around us.

For instance, there was the Stealing of the Eucalyptus Trees. We had had no idea at the time that it might be necessary to employ a special watchman to guard the young trees outside our own enclosure.

It was in the spring that we had planted a thousand trees. Eleven hundred and sixty-four, to be exact.

It had been quite an undertaking, for it had been necessary to order them months in advance and then, on delivery, to work and plant for a period of two weeks with the help of 'Brahim and four assistant gardeners (the staff was increased when the work was heavy).

The first four hundred young eucalyptus arrived on a very warm day by special truck from Baghdad. They had been on the way for two days. It took two hours to lift them carefully



from the truck to the ground and set them against the fences to rest in shady places after their long journey.

Even then, when we first touched and handled them, we began to have favorites amongst these straight-stemmed, slender trees. Some were more sympathetic in their arrangement of branches. The bark of some had a smoother and cooler feel. And others had longer and greener leaves. We chose the best locations for our favorites and ourselves carried them carefully to their destinations. It was very hard work, for the trees were heavy. They ranged from four to twelve feet high, and their roots were bound in earth and tied with palm fiber and sacking.

When, within a few days, the next shipments arrived, one by camel back and one by boat, we raced against time in the planting.

Each day we worked late into the evening, and then, when

the gardeners were gone, we spent hours going over the grounds and deciding where to plant the next day's trees. Even with eleven hundred and sixty-four we had to choose the locations carefully.

We had no idea at the time that some of them might not live to grow up.

The gardeners came early in the morning. One of us worked just ahead of 'Brahim who, according to direction, dug the first shovelful of earth to indicate the exact spot for each planting. Two of the assistants dug the holes to the right depth and width, and another transported new earth to each hole to give the roots the proper soil to grow in. The fifth man helped the other one of us to carry the trees to their places.

We set aside forty-five specially sturdy trees to plant as far away as the road. It would be fine, we thought, to give a green shelter and a cool shade to those who passed by on the road. (We had in mind the women who walked there daily, bent over with heavy loads of brushwood on their backs.)

'Brahim tried to discourage us.

"It is impossible to dig an irrigation ditch to the road," he said.

"But why? We have dug them every place else, 'Brahim."

"Near the road the land is much higher, Memsahib," 'Brahim explained.

"But why can't we carry the water to the trees?"

"It is too far," said 'Brahim, "to carry the water."

"Then we will get an extra boy to carry the water."

"We will need two, Memsahib."

"Then we will get two boys, 'Brahim."

He thought up several more reasons for not planting as far away as the road. But our hearts were set on it.

We planted the forty-five trees there, though the very

women we wanted to help stopped with their loads and laughed at the idea of tree planting.

The next day when we went out to look at those trees, they looked very fresh and beautiful, though a bit odd with their reed supports which were planted beside each one. The reeds stuck up in the air higher than the trees.

But the next day when we walked out to the road, the ground seemed a little bare.

Some of the trees were gone!

We counted them and found out that twenty-three were missing.

We called to one of the water boys. "Where are the trees that were here yesterday?"

"I don't know, Memsahib."

"Go get 'Brahim! Go get Ali! Hurry!"

'Brahim came quickly.

"What has happened to these trees, 'Brahim?"

He was just as puzzled as we were. Then he became furious.

He called out to Ali who was just coming from the house.

They talked excitedly for five minutes. Everyone gathered to hear.

"But what is it? What are you talking about?" we asked.

"The trees have been stolen!" said Ali the Watchman.

"I will murder the one who has taken them!" said 'Brahim.

We started investigations. Nothing came to light. We planted twenty-three more trees in the vacant holes.

But the next day when we arrived on the spot early in the morning, there was not a tree to be seen! The ground was as bare as it had been before the tree planting had begun.

This time 'Brahim was not angry. He was only a little sad.

In Arabic he said the equivalent of, "I told you so in the first place." But he said it gently.

"We cannot stop them, Memsahib. These trees they have

taken will make good wood for the winter fires of these people," he added. "To them their fires are more important than shade in the future."

We never found out who had stolen them, nor did we ever replace them.

Now during these hot summer months we spent many early morning hours working with our trees and giving them our personal attention.

Of the eleven hundred and sixty-four, about seven hundred and fifty trees survived.

Each tree that died brought sadness into our hearts. In our imagination, each young stem, from the moment we placed it in the earth, was already a tall, waving, graceful tree that spread its shade for our comfort and its own beauty.

It seemed too bad to lose them through lack of care. So we supervised the watering ourselves, making an inspection each day. We had hired two boys for the job, but we suspected that when we were not looking, they gave the trees only a cupful of water each. When we watched them they were so generous that the poor trees seemed drowned. Since to these boys a tree had no beauty or value, and since it was hard work to carry a four-gallon petrol tin full of water, one could hardly blame them for taking it easy when we turned our backs.

Some of the trees suffered a more violent death than by thirst.

All summer long, in order to prevent as many of these casualties as possible, we were obliged to be on the lookout for the men who towed the sailing boats upstream. These naked men, half bent over their ropes as they pulled, had their job to do, and if such a thing as a young tree was in the way, they simply snapped it off with their ropes.

They could not understand why we made such a fuss. Since they had the right of way along the bank, we could do noth-

ing but watch for them, rush out to the riverbank, and beg them to be careful.

But not one of the trees near the bank survived. Those that were not snapped off by the boatmen were eventually swept away by the river when the banks crumbled during flood time.

In some sections of the grounds the salt in the earth was responsible for a few losses. During the planting 'Brahim had cautioned us about these salty patches. He would pick up a little earth, taste it to see how much salt it contained, and then shake his head. But we paid little attention to his advice.

Dusting off the trees with our feather dusters also took up a lot of time during the summer. And it made us and the trees look very foolish, indeed. But we hoped by this treatment to prevent the tender new leaves from shriveling up and dying as some of them were doing. We concluded that the heavy dust had something to do with this drying-up process, that a coating of fine dust on the leaves prevented them from breathing the air. A thorough dusting, and after that a sprinkling from the top downward to wash them clean, seemed the obvious remedy, though we hardly hoped to win any prizes for bright ideas from gardening societies.

When we became too sad over the increasing deaths of our trees, we would go to a corner of the garden and look at the little *mishmish* trees.

These had been a surprise.

Long ago the very ancient father of 'Brahim had asked us for *mishmish* (apricot) pits from fruit we had bought in Baghdad. The next day we gave him two dozen. Then we saw him sitting in a corner of the garden, digging with his hands in the earth. He had not explained what he was doing. He had just gone on with the digging.

He had been there for hours, working and then resting, a

very tired old man. When his work was finished, he had walked slowly away, leaning on a great stick.

One day, months later, he came back and asked for us.

Then he led us to the corner of the garden where he had sat digging for so many hours. He pointed to a little plant that was coming through the earth. There were about sixteen little plants growing here and there, and some of them were already two or three inches high.

He was very proud of his trees.

He held out his hand to indicate a certain height. He said that when his son's son, who was still drinking his mother's milk, had grown that high, the *mishmish* would bear fruit.

XXVI

The Summer Continues

SOME EVENINGS WHEN it was too hot to sit still, we drove out onto the desert. There, because of the speed of the car, the breeze fanned our faces.

At this time of the year, everything had dried up. The ground was hard, and large cracks wiggled their ways in complicated patterns that made bumpy riding.

There was no poverty there on the desert. Of everything that one saw, there was plenty: boundless, dark-blue sky, an immense amount of empty space, and a dazzling lavishness of stars. In these surroundings the unimportance of trivial things was impressive. What difference if the Cook were drunk, or the Night Watchman asleep when we left the house? On this desert waste, it did not seem to matter.

We had discovered that living as we did in isolated Brooksville, with only occasional absences and few visitors, we had been affected in two quite opposite ways. Our outlooks were both narrowed and broadened. Trifling incidents took on an importance undeserved, while on the other hand, this same isolation gave us a fine perspective of the world we had formerly lived in.

The influence of these two effects undoubtedly showed in our painting, for we saw the details of our surroundings more clearly and with increased significance. At the same time we were far enough away from the confusing swirls of other people's ideas on art to add, subtract, and get our own answer.

Sometimes on those hot nights we went as far as the *Wadi*. One night we drove up as close as possible to the work that was going on so that we could watch it. There were a few lanterns here and there lighting up the scene. The laborers were loading gravel into trains. One shift of men went on at six in the evening and worked till six the next morning when another shift took their places.

We could not see the coolies clearly, but we could hear them, for they were singing. They sang the same melody (if you could call it that) over and over again.

"What are they saying?" we asked of Henri.

He listened for a minute and then smiled.

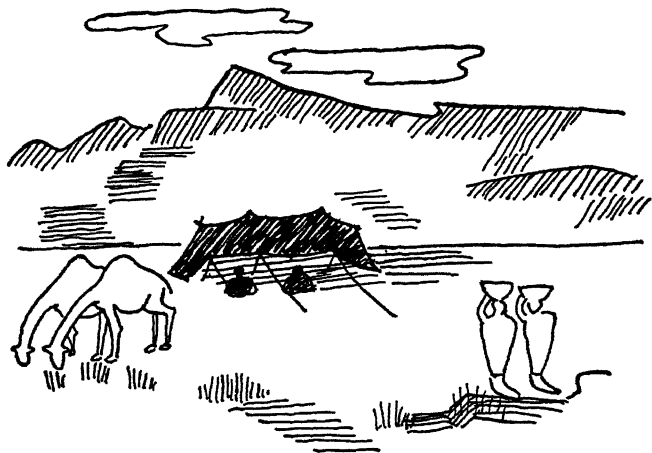
"It's not very important."

"But it must be something, Henri?"

"Well," he said, "it goes like this . . ." and Henri sang the following words.

Mr. Brooks is a good man,
He gives us work to do.
Mr. Faivre is a good man,
We work for him too!

It sounded weird and primitive across the night air. It seemed more in keeping with the night to believe that there were *jinns* out there—*jinns* in a good humor who were chanting and singing. Certainly this was a fine place for spirits, and a night especially made for them. Here we were, at the very edge of Persia, where the mountains began. They were looming up nearby, fit hiding places for the *jinns*. We remembered how we had seen them in the winter daylight. The



snow had made them look like heaps of pudding with whipped cream oozing from their tops. On some days in the summer, going purple at their peaks, they looked the color of raspberry icecream. At all times, even in the dark, they were mysterious and unfathomable.

And they hid the secrets of Persia from us.

We had always had the desire to go beyond this barrier of mountains to find out what lay there. It was shortly after we had heard the coolies singing in the night that we got a second-hand view of what was there, for Henri was taken and kept a prisoner by the Persians.

It had been a burning hot day. Henri had been at the *Wadi*, but was expected back about six. We sat in the coolest spot in the garden waiting for him, but when by nine o'clock he had not come, we had our dinner and went to bed, thinking that perhaps something had happened at the *Wadi* to keep him there.

During the night we were awakened by a knocking at the door. It was the English foreman who had gone up to the

Wadi with Henri to make some repairs there. He came with a flickering lantern and a tale—a tale of guns and Persian soldiers and adventure. He told his story in such a broad Yorkshire accent that we could hardly understand him.

He said that when it was time for lunch Henri had suggested that they get into the car and go find a pleasant spot to eat, away from the fly-attracting coolies.

But as they drove, they forgot about their sandwiches, because each new turn that they took revealed some new and more magnificent landscape. Since no one seems to know the exact border line between Iraq and Persia at this point, Henri thought he was still on the safe side. They had been driving less than ten minutes, when suddenly, after a sharp turn, they saw before them a tiny hut all by itself in the wilderness. It turned out to be a police post, and out of it rushed four ragged-looking soldiers who promptly took them prisoners.

These soldiers were not prepared to cope with such an unusual thing as two foreigners driving a car nonchalantly through this wilderness, and must have decided to take no chances and to make no mistakes. They were armed and made it perfectly plain what they would do if Henri tried to turn and drive back. After several conferences among themselves they decided to let the foreman go.

"They did not think I looked important enough to bother with!" said the foreman to us as he set down his lantern.

"But what did they do with Henri?" we asked.

"Well, just as I was starting back on foot," and he looked down at his feet, "two of the soldier chaps jumped on the running board and motioned for Mr. Faivre to drive in an easterly direction."

"The imbeciles!" was what Henri had called back to the foreman as he was forced to drive off. It was a good thing that the soldiers spoke only Persian.

As the car was lost to sight, the foreman was allowed to

begin his long walk back to the *Wadi* and then to the River Plant, since all trains were hung up on account of repairs.

By telegraph the next morning Douglas asked the aid of the French and Persian Consuls. The second day Henri sent a messenger by foot from the Fort where he had been taken. This messenger was allowed to come as far as the *Wadi* with the note, and to wait there for the things that we were to send back with him to Henri. We sent a blanket, some Persian money (that Simon got hold of), and a few tins of bully beef.

Telegrams went from us to Baghdad, from Baghdad to Teheran, from Teheran to Baghdad. Every day we had assurances that surely *that* day Henri would be released. But the trouble was that messages from Teheran to the Fort where Henri was imprisoned were long in reaching there. They had to be sent part way by horse, and part way by foot.

With these delays it was eight days before Henri came back.

He appeared one morning, by this time almost surprising us, and told us the story. He said that he had been directed, that day of the arrest, to drive with his two escorts for fifty miles through the passes that led behind the mountains. The route was a kind of track used, he supposed, for smuggling goods from Persia into Iraq.

They finally reached a sort of fortress village, consisting of one mud Fort and a few lanes of little houses.

The officer in charge of this strange Fort spoke a little Arabic, but he was puzzled about how to treat this stranger while he waited word from Teheran as to his disposition.

At first Henri was kept within the Fort, a real prisoner, but later the officer changed his mind and put him on his honor. The car was closely guarded, but Henri was given a horse to ride and a gun to hunt with and a girl (to cook for him, he said). But the officer warned Henri that if he tried to escape, he would be caught by the soldiers who were watching him.

So he ate and he drank and he hunted and he learned a little Persian until finally instructions reached the officer that by arrangements with the French Consul at Teheran, Henri was to be released immediately.

"Mon Dieu!" said Henri as he finished his story, "I've seen Persia!"

By this time Brooksville had grown.

It had become a thriving community. Its native population had grown from zero to three hundred souls. There was a whole village of workmen on the other side of the Plant. Jassim's café did a fine business.

The European population of Brooksville had increased by thirty-three and one-third percent. That made eight persons in all. (One of these new men was an engineer who had been sent by the River Transport Company. He rented a small house from us. The other was an Italian engineer who was imported from Egypt to work for Douglas at the Plant.)

All this growth was a result of the Gravel Plant.

But the complications had increased with the population. It was fascinating but discouraging to hear Henri and Douglas talk about the troubles at the Plant. They were having difficulties in getting and keeping labor.

Wages had risen to fifty, sixty, and seventy *fihs* a day in comparison to twenty *fihs* a day that was a standard wage during the Turkish regime. Even with this increase, it was not easy to get labor that could be relied on.

One of the reasons for this difficulty was that the Arabs around us had the idea that to work was degrading, and that to work for more than enough for simple necessities was positively silly. (What more could a man want than a few dates, a little *kubz*, and meat once a month? When one had enough to eat for a few days, why not stop work until one is hungry again?)

As for clothes, the wants of these people were simple. We had seen them during the winter, shivering and suffering in the cold with no more on their backs than they wore in the summer. Or if they had warm clothes they were an odd assortment, ranging from rags to sheepskin-lined mantles. Those who had shoes took them off in the mud of winter so that they would not be ruined. It seemed to be the children who suffered most in the cold weather, so for the greater part of the winter they stayed inside the little mud huts, squatting over a smoky open fire.

Loyalty was a rather rare virtue. We had seen evidences of it when the Arab had informed Simon of the camel raid. And for more than a year Mohammed had seemed to be loyal to us (at least he professed it often enough), but later he was to turn so completely the other way that we were almost afraid of him. It was said, too, that during the War, the tribes in Iraq were loyal usually to the side that seemed at the moment to be winning.

Sometimes their idea of loyalty took a rather unexpected turn. Once in Baghdad there was a Moslem doorkeeper at a Catholic Convent. This old doorkeeper (and in the Orient a doorkeeper is just as important a personality as he is on Park Avenue) had guarded for a generation the gates of this school for girls, and he watched conscientiously over the comings and goings of the French nuns and their pupils.

Hearing dark rumors of unrest and backstairs whispers of possible religious warfare, the Directress of the convent went to the old watchman.

"Ibrahim," she said to him, "would the people of this house be in danger if a religious war should break out?"

"Fear nothing, Mother," said Ibrahim. "How long have I served you?"

He stood proudly and answered his own question. "Praise

be to Allah, my father and his father before him have served you, O Mother, and I, Ibrahim, have served you as long as the oldest sister can remember."

"Yes, you are right, Ibrahim," said the Directress.

"See then, how I love you all," Ibrahim went on. "By Allah, I will take care of you! If an order should go forth in Islam to suppress the Christians, may Allah forbid, the order would come to me for this house. But do not be alarmed, O Mother; I will take care of everything. You may put yourselves in my hands!"

"Thank you, Ibrahim," said the Directress.

Ibrahim caressed his favorite knife that hung on his belt. His tone was reassuring as he continued, "You may tell all the Sisters to trust Ibrahim, son of Joseph. I will do everything so quickly and so quietly—and from behind—that they will never know what has happened!"

What we call "ambition" was only to be found in a few cases. Then it was probably possessed by someone who had had previous contact with Europeans in such towns as Basrah or Baghdad. On several occasions, the only effective way to get a job done was to hold back on the pay for a few days.

We are not prepared to say that this contentment with mere necessities is not a happier state than the struggle of the Western World for piling up of unnecessary possessions, but we do say that it makes the way of industry difficult.

One of the exceptions to the non-ambitious attitude was Jamil, who was called Office Boy. Jamil was a most diligent person. He would be called upon at a moment's notice to take almost anyone's job. He was observant and quick to learn. He reminded us of the bellboys on the American ships whose answer to every request is "Okay!" The only thing that ever interfered with Jamil's work was his habit of getting married often. On each of these occasions there was a new dress to be

bought, an advance in pay to be got, and then a celebration. Jamil would be quite worn out from the festivities and would require a day or two to recover his energy.

But in each of his marriages, his enthusiasm for the new wife lasted only a few months. "She no good; I send her back!" was his explanation.

(We never knew whether the girl enjoyed the change as much as Jamil did.)

Perhaps it was because Jamil needed money to continue his marital experiments that he was so ambitious. For each time that he divorced a wife, he was bound to pay her family a fine in addition to the original marriage price.

Another case of ambition was that of a sergeant in the machine gun squad that had escorted us home on the rainy night of the Mutasarrif's dinner.

At the end of that wet drive, Douglas had given the sergeant a *dinar* to be divided between the men. This *backsheesh* (tip) began a series of incidents which showed the stuff the sergeant was made of.

A letter arrived a few days later from the Mutasarrif of Amarah, thanking us for the consideration that we had shown to the escort, but advising us that these men were not open to gifts of money. The Mutasarrif added that the sergeant's integrity and honesty were such that he had voluntarily returned the *dinar* to the Mutasarrif.

Just then during the reading of the letter the *dinar*-note fluttered from between the pages. We were rebuked for presuming that there could be even a little corruption in Eden.

In a postscript the Mutasarrif added that as a reward for his honesty the sergeant had been given a promotion and a slight raise in pay.

"Good work!" said Douglas, and he toasted the sergeant with his cup of morning coffee.

The fellow *was* smart, we thought. He deserved a promo-

tion. Had he kept his money, he would have been obliged to divide it with his three companions.

One day several weeks later, the sergeant appeared at the Plant. He called on Douglas and Henri at their office there. He said it was his day off, and he had come to have a look around. We were such nice people, he said. He hung around for several hours and late in the day he called on Douglas again. He had brought a present for him, he said.

He produced a very fine knife with a carved wooden handle inlaid with silver. His brother had made it, he said.

He told Douglas, in a nice little speech, how he had returned the *dinar* to the Governor, and how he had received the welcome promotion from the generous Governor.

So when Douglas accepted the knife from the sergeant, he gave the man another *dinar*, presumably as a return present for the knife. The sergeant smiled.

"May Peace be upon you!" he said, and he went away happily. This time he would not have to share with anyone.

Douglas presented the knife to us.

This sergeant should go far, we thought. He might have done well in our Western world.

"It just goes to show," said Douglas, "what far-sighted investing will do for you. In this case the investment consisted of only a little honesty, cleverness, and a home-made knife. The result was—" And Douglas wrote down on the tablecloth:

One pound net profit.

A reputation for honesty.

One promotion in rank.

A monthly reward in the form of a raise in pay.

XXVII

Blood Money

AT LAST THE LONG stretch of summer was nearly over, and we were eagerly awaiting the fall when the temperature could be relied upon to drop slightly.

Our nerves were ragged and jumpy. Henri and Douglas, who had endured these six-month summers for years now, were thin and worn. They were drinking Enos Fruit Salts and Malted Milk. We urged one or both of them to take a holiday, but they had their troubles at the Plant to keep them there.

The Plant had been working twenty-four hours a day throughout this summer. No time was lost. Three shifts of men, eight hours each, followed one another to make the work continuous.

One night at the Plant a young Arab laborer was electrocuted. He had wandered into a forbidden section and touched some live wires.

Douglas and one of the Italians worked over the man with artificial respiration to try to revive him, but after a short time it was evident that the effort was hopeless.

The next morning the family of the young man came to claim his body. We watched from our roof top. Even as far away as we were, we could hear the women moaning and wailing. Simon took the body in his car to the village where the man had lived. The women ran after the car, unrestrained in their crying, their long gowns and *abbas* dragging in the road as they went.

The men of the family followed, slowly and soberly, but talking in loud voices about the man who had gone so suddenly from them. Perhaps they were discussing how and when he could be taken to the Holy Cities for final burial. Very likely he would lie somewhere near his village until there was money enough to move him to Nejaf or Kerbala.

In the meantime the case would come up for discussion in the Tribal Court, to be settled according to the unwritten Tribal Law which rules these people more effectively than any code that may be imposed by the Government. The blood law demands payment for a man's life.

It was a week or so before Douglas was asked to go to Ali Gharbi to talk it over.

Then the family of the man asked, in return for their loss, the following:

1. Three women (worth fifteen *dinars* each).
2. Five *dinars* for burial.
3. One-*dinar backsheesh* (for whom we did not know).

When we heard about the terms of the settlement, we asked Douglas, "What are you going to use as women? Are you going to turn us in as two of the three?"

"Can you bake *kubz*?" he said.

"Well, no," we admitted.

"Can you carry heavy loads of firewood for miles every day?"

"No."

"Can you bear a son each year?"

"We've never tried it!"

"Can you shear sheep, weave cloth, and build the fires—in fact, can you do a real woman's job?"

The answer was again "No."

Obviously we would not do. It was startling to think how many people there were in the world to whom we wouldn't be worth a cent.

So, since Douglas did not represent a tribe, the family of the dead man agreed to accept the money equivalent of the three women. Items one, two, and three, added up to fifty-one *dinars* for a life. (In this case, of course, payment in women was not really expected. It was their way of reaching an appropriate figure.)

But there was a great deal of common sense underlying their curious way of paying for spilled blood. Often the exchange of women brings about reconciliations between enemy tribes. The woman becomes peacemaker, since it is likely that her marriage to one of the hostile tribe, and subsequent children, will accomplish what nothing else could. This custom has been in existence ever since the difficult struggle for life on the desert made such strict codes necessary.

At first the life of the sacrificed girl may be an unpleasant one in the hostile camp, but surely her chances for happiness are as good as they are if she stays with her own people, to be given in marriage to someone of her family's choice whom she has never known. The tribeswoman accepts her fate, in either case, as an inevitable one.

It was on one of the hottest days in early October that His Excellency Jaafar Pasha came to see us.

Jaafar al Askari was the Minister of Defense. If you look on page one hundred and sixty-six of Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, you will see a picture of Jaafar as he looked

when he was Feisal's Commander-in-Chief during the Arab Revolt.

Jaafar had changed a good deal since then; he had grown heavy, but his fatness made him look more jovial than he appeared in the picture.

He came that hot day with the Mutasarrif of Amarah. They had left Baghdad to go South to the Samawah section on the lower Euphrates, where there were new raids and uprisings.

Though we were far from Samawah, it immediately became obvious that Jaafar had it on his mind. He took a gulp of tea, and looked around the octagonal room.

"This *is* a room!" he exclaimed.

And his eyes traveled up the twenty-foot walls, where, as we have said before, there were no windows until the very top, and then only one small window in each of the eight walls. These looked out over the rest of the roof, which was lower by two feet than that of the octagonal room.

We had never thought of it as a fort in case of need, but it was the first idea that occurred to Jaafar.

He was surprised, he said, to find in this remoteness so comfortable a room. He liked the colors of the chintzes. We took all the credit. "You know what *men* are when it comes to furnishings," we said.

"All women are alike," said Jaafar. "My wife is just the same. She disagrees with my taste."

"And what do you do about it?"

"Since she has presented me with such fine sons, she may have her own way in my house."

We had met Madame Jaafar some weeks before in Baghdad, when Jaafar, who had heard us say that we liked Arab food, had invited us to have some of it with him. It had turned out to be a real dinner party, with Madame Jaafar in a Paris gown presiding graciously. Her presence would have

been very unusual had it not been that she had lived in London for some years when Jaafar was there as Minister from Iraq.

The East and the West met that evening. The ancient Tigris flowed silently below the terrace. Long-skirted servants served a many-course dinner consisting of heaps of Iraqi and Arab food: pilaffs, stuffed *brinjol* (eggplant), cucumbers bulging with rice and oil, curried smoked fish (our favorite), meat pastries, and many other exciting things. And while we ate all this, there was conversation in Arabic, French, Norwegian, English, and a Scottish dialect, for the guests were representatives of all these nations.

A very old man served the coffee. It was sharp and spicy and *good*. Like Bedouin coffee. But we drank it out of fine china, while Jaafar told us that the old man had done nothing else for fifteen years except to make and serve coffee in this household.

We saw around us old Persian paintings on the walls; everything was of the Orient here, but in the most prominent place in the dining room stood an immense hotel-size Frigidaire!

When dinner was over we moved from the women's quarters to Jaafar's official house next door, where he wanted to show us his collection of ibex and gazelle. These beautiful creatures were tethered separately on the incredibly green lawn. And around this space were rose gardens and tall trees; above, a moon vied with the electric bulbs that were strung from tree to tree. So far away did this garden seem from Time, that it might have been in any age: in the very Beginning, or during the Thousand and One Nights, or even in this Twentieth Century. But this last seemed the least likely.

It was a moment of perfection.

We imagined it caught and pinned down in a Persian Miniature. The picture would be divided horizontally into thirds:

Two-thirds green at the bottom (for grass) and one-third dark blue at the top (for sky). Over all of this, formalized figures of men and women would be scattered—women in long gowns, the trains of which would lie lightly on the grasses (each grass drawn by a separate stroke of the brush). Spotting the whole picture, in a regular pattern, would be the beautifully drawn, thin-legged gazelles and the horned ibex, each tied to his stake.

But just at that moment Jaafar walked out of his place in our Miniature to call one ibex by name and to pet him. Then he turned to us and talked about our proposed trip to the Holy Cities.

"You must wear long sleeves and stockings," he told us.

"It isn't dangerous to go by ourselves?"

"You never need be afraid in our Moslem country," said Jaafar. "Here women are held to be almost sacred. I think this is one of the few countries in the world where a woman, as such, is absolutely safe. In fact," he added, "nowadays it is quite safe for anyone."

While he was talking, we remembered the story that Lawrence tells about Jaafar in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. It happened during the War when Jaafar was an officer in the Turkish and German Armies and was well-known for his distinguished service.

He was taken prisoner by the British and sent to the Citadel in Cairo where he was imprisoned. One night, by means of a ladder made from blankets, he tried to escape, but with his weight the blankets gave way suddenly, and Jaafar suffered a sprained ankle from the fall. On account of the injury he was unable to get away and was recaptured.

Jaafar paid for the ruined blankets and was allowed some freedom on parole. When he heard of the murder by the Turks of his Arab nationalist friends, he was convinced that he had been fighting for the wrong cause. He turned his back



on the Turks and joined sides with Feisal and the British.

Since then Jaafar had held very high positions and was much respected in both Europe and the Near East. It is said that Jaafar is one of the few persons to have been presented with important decorations by both England and Germany.

That day at Brooksville we showed Jaafar the studio and some of the paintings we were working on. He was surprised at our interest in the people around us: the Bedouins, villagers and laborers. It seemed odd to him that we had come from America to Iraq's remoteness.

"You are not lonely?" he asked.

"No, not at all. We like it!"

Nevertheless he asked us to come up to Baghdad to a party to be given by the women of his family.

"It will be for women only," he said. "You will meet people and watch the dancing—and sketch if you like."

Jaafar pointed to a little sketch tacked on the wall. It was of Jaafar himself.

"Do you remember when you did that one?" he asked. And he took a pencil and wrote below the drawing, "O.K. J. A."

When Jaafar and the Mutasarrif left that day, it was just getting dark. We walked out with them to the gate, where we could see dimly many Arab robes and some uniforms. These men had come down from Baghdad with Jaafar Pasha. They were just then finishing off great pitchers of lemon squash that we had had sent out to them.

As they prepared to leave, lanterns and headlights flashed in the near-dark, and white headdresses accented the movements of the Arabs. Then there were handshakings and *Fi aman illahs* (good-bys), and they were gone.

Jaafar had given us an appointment for an interview (we wanted to write something about him) for the twenty-ninth of October.

We did not know, of course, that trouble was brewing in Baghdad that was to end in tragedy; nor did we know that we would never see Jaafar again, and that on the day of our appointment with him he would lie in a secret grave in the desert.

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XXVIII

The King Is Coming

ONE WEEK BEFORE WE were to go to Baghdad for the interview with Jaafar, we received this letter:

Dear Mrs. Brooks,

It is reported that H. M. will visit Amarah on the twenty-seventh. The Mutasarrif would very much like you both to inspect the Royal Apartments on the twenty-sixth and make suggestions regarding the improvements of decorations, furnishings, and so forth.

Will you come down for the two days—Monday and Tuesday?

We promise to do our best to make the visit interesting, and we trust that you will be able to persuade Mr. Brooks to accompany you.

The invitation came from the only English family living in Amarah.

A day of excitement in the quietness of late summer was held out to us. At first we wanted to take it, but then we were confronted with the effort and the complications of getting away. Oh, well, we told ourselves, we are superior to the

necessity for social excitement; we *prefer* to remain in our isolation. But all the time we knew that we *did* want to go—it was just too much trouble to get started!

Finally, with the idea of working in the Amarah trip just ahead of the Baghdad trip, we left Brooksville on the twenty-sixth in the usual last-minute confusion of water bottles and little extra packages to stuff “beside you on the seat” or “there behind that basket,” when there was really not an inch of room left anywhere in the car. Everybody surrounded us, shutting doors and opening them, shining the metal bits, and running into the house for another tin of bully beef.

(It will always be like this, we thought, no matter how short the journey—that is, when Douglas isn’t with us. When he is, then we *have* to manage so that there is less confusion. But this time he is not with us, and this hectic getting-away will drive us mad.)

But the minute we were out of the gate everything was different.

The late October day started with a very fresh morning sun. Our mountains had little white clouds over some of their heads. There was something in the air. Something that made one feel like doing all the things left undone for months. We would write those letters to America the minute we got back. We would launder Boycat and clean his ears with olive oil and boric acid powder. We would brush *each* cat *every* day.

As we drove past the Plant and on through the desolate section beyond, we grew quite lightly happy with the assurance that these little odd jobs were already practically done, now that we had mentally met and grappled with the *idea* of doing them.

With all the early morning freshness and the wetness on the ground from the dew of the night, we could hardly believe that before long the sun would dry up everything.

By the time we had made the two-hour trip to Amarah, it



was so hot that we could hardly bear the thought of waiting the necessary half-hour for the bridge of boats to open (it had been closed to let the Canal traffic through) so that we could cross to the town. The old bridge sagged and creaked and seemed to be breathing its last dying gasps. It really was breathing its last, for the new orange-red bridge stood near by waiting to be officially opened by the King the next day.

Hundreds of streamers waved from the new bridge, making it even more gaudy than it would have been in its naked orange-redness. Little groups of people stood off enjoying such a very gay color in the middle of the desert's drabness.

The town was excited and crowds were everywhere. We found quiet in the English house during lunch, but later, on our way to the Mutasarrif's, we saw that the excitement of the morning was increasing.

The King was coming!

For days in advance all Amarah had been preparing for the King's visit. Palm trees had offered the finest of their branches to decorate the doorways. The wealthy inhabitants of the town

had lent to the Mutasarrif their best furniture and their choicest *objets d'art* in order to make His Majesty and Party as comfortable as possible. The English family had invited out-of-town guests from Brooksville. Thousands of colored Christmas tree lights were strung throughout the city. Blankets and covers to keep the King snug for the night had been ordered from the best shops in Baghdad. And the three young women School Teachers (one Egyptian, one Syrian, and one Iraqi), together with the head of the school, had given two weeks of their time sewing up Japanese satin drapes and sofa cushions.

And at the last moment, when our English host had said that *his* King never rode in anything but an open car in a case like this, the Ford agency from Basrah sent their newest open model at top speed up to Amarah.

And now in the Royal Apartments at the Mutasarrif's house, the excitement had reached a great pitch. The King's Apartment was almost ready. Only one thing was wrong. There was a large gray spot right in the middle of the Royal Bedspread. This cover had only just arrived that morning from Baghdad and there had not been time to wash and dry it. Such a splendid spread had lain in the shop for so many years that a spot or two was to be expected. But the Mutasarrif felt his responsibility heavily. We did everything we could think of to remove the spot. We even used white talcum powder. But the spot remained. And then someone thought very brilliantly of covering the spot with a sofa cushion—one of the nice, new satin ones. The problem was solved.

The Apartment had been well done. We approved of everything.

Finally it was time to put the roses on the King's dressing table.

But nowhere could a suitable vase be found to put them in! The Mutasarrif made a telephone call or two on the Royal

Telephone, and a messenger was sent to our host's house to fetch the little silver vases from the mantle.

A young Chaldean woman had brought armfuls of roses from her garden.

And now while she arranged the flowers, we all sat down for a moment's rest in His Majesty's Bedroom—the three School Teachers, our English hostess, the wife of the Syrian doctor, the Minister of Public Works, the Mutasarrif, and ourselves. We made a strangely assorted group, sitting on the Royal Chairs that the King would sit on tomorrow, and patting the last Royal Wrinkle from the spread of the Royal Bed in which he would sleep.

As we rested carefully on the Royal Furniture, we all began to feel rather like royalty ourselves. Or if not exactly like royalty, then the nearest thing to it. After all, we thought, one seldom has the chance to be a Lady of the Bedchamber, so to speak!

We were in such a royal mood that when our host's shiny, open car drove us through the streets to take us back to the English house, we almost bowed graciously to the crowds that already lined the way waiting to see their King.

That evening there was much celebrating amongst the townsmen and visiting Sheikhs and the tribesmen. The open coffeehouses were full. The colored lights twinkled through the mists of dust that lay over the town, stirred up by the feet of so many people. And though it imparted a sort of magic to the pictures seen through it, it also got into one's eyes and lay thick on the brim of one's hat.

Our own celebration was more conventional. Our hosts gave a dinner which was attended by the Mutasarrif, the Chaldean lady and her husband, the Syrian doctor and his wife and ourselves. This gathering included the whole European element of Amarah, with the exception of the two

American missionaries who lived in the town but did not take much part in its social life.

The King came early the following morning.

There was an excited and enthusiastic response to his arrival by air—an indication in this ancient land of the modern spirit which the King himself encourages.

In the crowd that lined the streets we waited for the Royal Car to come from the landing field. The Boy Scouts, who were not quite like any other Boy Scouts, with their Arab faces rising out of magenta Japanese scarves, headed the parade; then soldiers with great flags pranced along on fine Arab horses; little girls in white dresses and *abbas*, each with three white roses held stiffly in front of her, marched seriously down the street.

When these distractions were over, everyone began to wonder how the King would look, and when at last he was driven by slowly in the shining Ford, everyone said, "Why, the King smiled at *me!*"

For his smile seemed to be personal and genuine. This was one of his first public good-will tours.

And then we went on to the *Serai* (Courthouse) through the great crowds. Inside the *Serai* we found the King with the big Sheikhs of the district, elders of the town, and officials. There was the smile again accompanied by hand-shaking as the Mutasarrif made the introductions. Our English hostess and we were the only women present in this gathering of men.

During the formal opening of the orange-red bridge and the laying of the cornerstone of the leper colony, we went back to eat a quiet breakfast to the tune of buzzing airplanes overhead that were giving free rides as a gift from His Majesty. It was a chance in a lifetime for a Boy Scout or a Sheikh who had never seen Amarah from the sky. Our host's chauffeur asked for an hour off so that he could go up in one of

the planes. During the entire flight he hid his face in his hands, but for the rest of his life he can tell his friends how fine it was!

At five in the afternoon there was an official tea, and everyone dressed up in his best to make a picture fit for a King. Two Paris hats next to headdresses of impressive-looking Sheikhs, a couple of frocks from Fifth Avenue in contrast to fine brown and black *abbas*, shoes from London under the same table with barefoot sandals that were made here in the bazaars.

When His Majesty arrived with another royal smile and took his seat on the platform, many photographers appeared. It was like the opening night of a new picture in Hollywood. But in this case the photographers looked as if they themselves were the actors in costume and belonged in the picture.

The speeches were short and the poems very long. The town poet had done his best, but unfortunately we could not understand a word of all the lines he recited at the King. During this time we made sketches of His Majesty. They turned out to look very much like him, and since there seemed to be some curiosity on the royal platform as to what we were doing, we sent the sketches up with the message that we would like to present the King with the one he preferred. He liked the sketch in color. We were to send it over later to the Mutasarrif's.

The feature of the evening was to be a dinner served *on* the new bridge for a hundred and fifty guests (all men, of course).

When we heard of it we thought it a very odd idea, and we wondered if it had some special Iraqi significance or if it dated back to some ancient rite. But we learned later that it was Douglas's idea!

He had seen it done in Egypt and had suggested it to the Mutasarrif who had asked for his advice.

From the tea we went to spend an hour with the Egyptian, the Syrian, and the Iraqi school teachers who had asked us to visit them in the apartment they shared together.

We were surprised when we walked into the room to hear a male voice call out:

"Hello, Ruth! Hello, Helen!"

The voice belonged to the only male Iraqi school teacher in Amarah. We had met him in Baghdad months before while we were trying to buy two dozen pomegranates. As he stood beside us watching the performance, he had seen that our Arabic would never close the deal and he had surprised us with:

"I'd like to help you ladies out, no kidding," in perfect Middle West.

We found then that this kind soul had attended Northwestern University. Later he had lived for some months in the International House on Riverside Drive, where he was encouraged and practically compelled to use first names on first acquaintance in order to feel at home in the United States. He did feel at home, too, so much so that the recollection of America became his Golden Dream, needing only the sight of an American to set it in motion.

His fluent speech was rounded out with "Oh, boy!", "No kidding" (he liked this one best), "Skiddoo!", and "Skip it." (He had not been in America since "Skip it" had broken loose on the public, but he had read it, he explained, in an American magazine at the Christian Club in Baghdad.)

He found, he said, these slang phrases so expressive and so typical of Americans! And his face beamed in admiration and recollection.

Bless his soul for having such a pleasant impression of us as a nation!

As we talked to him now at the school teachers' apartment, we remembered the day of his visit at Brooksville in the

spring, when he had interested us very much with his intelligent views of his *own* country, and when, too, by calling us Ruth and Helen, he had caused Douglas to raise his eyebrows slightly.

The other guests at the apartment were the pilots who had flown the King and his party to Amarah. We were surprised to find that these comparatively emancipated girls lived pretty much as any school teachers in a small Middle Western town. They were at liberty to entertain in their own apartment (though only in groups) and they were on a social plane of their own. Theirs seemed to be a unique position in Iraq.

Strangely enough we all sat in the bedroom where the familiar iron bed was the main object of furniture.

We drank coffee which the girls themselves had prepared. The conversation was gay and there was no feeling of formality or restraint.

Had we looked up at the house from the street outside, we would have imagined that here behind these windows lived secluded women, women who never appeared except when veiled, women whose lives were secret from the outside world, women who were never spoken of, since in polite society one does not ask after the distaff side of the household.

And here instead we had found ourselves almost back in Minnesota or Wisconsin.

When we returned to our host's house we were greeted excitedly by the two small sons of the family. They had been waiting to tell us what had happened to them. It seemed that when the King left the tea in the open car, his route lay past the gate where the boys stood with their Iraqi flags waiting for him. In their excitement the boys waved their flags, and as the King drove by, very near, he looked at the two eager ones and *saluted*.

In their hearts, the two young Englishmen had become the King's loyal subjects for life.

There was word for us at the house that His Majesty awaited the arrival of the sketch that we had made of him. We sent it over to the Royal Apartments with our host's chauffeur who was glad to have a chance to do something in return for his morning's flight.

Though only a week was to pass before we were to see the King again, many grave things were to happen during that week. Our next meeting took place under much less festive circumstances.

XXIX

In a Sheikh's Harim

THE NEXT DAY OUR English hosts invited us to go with them to the house of Sheikh Mohammed Araby.

We had heard a great deal about this Sheikh, and we looked forward to the Arab lunch and the visit we were to make to his harim. To us his name sounded as if it had been selected out of a book, but our host assured us that it was genuine, that his position was important, and that he made a great deal of money on his rice crops.

He was supposed to own bedding for four hundred guests!

Since we had seen quite a stack of bedding in Sheikh Nuri's tents, we were eager to see what a stack of bedding for four hundred people would look like, and where he could possibly store so many quilts and blankets. Since we remembered sleeping under our coats several times last winter when we had more than four guests at one time, this sight was going to be a treat for us.

A story is told about Sheikh Araby that made us curious about him as a person. One day when he was on a hunting trip far away from his own house, he passed a group of

women who were walking on the road. He noticed that one of them was especially lovely, and he made inquiries about her. But no one seemed to know who she was. When the hunt was over, Sheikh Araby returned to his own house and sent out messengers to find out about the girl.

He desired her in marriage.

Very soon one of the messengers returned, bringing with him the surprising information that the girl was the Sheikh's own daughter!

Her mother had been divorced by the Sheikh when the child was very young. The girl had gone off with her mother, and her father had lost track of her.

Since our day was to be a full one and we were obliged to drive back to Brooksville that night, we started very early in the morning on our trip to the rice country. For some miles the road was only a track and we had to go slowly over the ruts and the holes.

Including the two young boys, there were seven of us in the car. These boys were looking forward to a visit with their young friend, one of the Sheikh's sons with whom they spoke a tribal dialect.

The seventh member of the party was Seleh Beg, an Iraqi who lived in Amarah. He was wearing an *agal* that fascinated us. This *agal* was different from any we had seen in this part of Iraq. It fitted over the headdress and covered the whole head almost like a hat (a woman's hat). It looked as if it had been made out of fat, twisted skeins of brown yarn which were bound at intervals with gold and cerise threads. We could not help but see it on ourselves, as if it were a chic creation out of the pages of the latest fashion sheet.

We did not want to ask about it in such a way that Seleh Beg would feel obliged to give it to us, but we *had* to find out where we could get such an *agal*.

While crossing the canal by ferry, we had a chance to make



what we thought were discreet inquiries about it, but the words were barely said when the *agal* was offered to us. Since Seleh Beg could not go without his head rope for the rest of the trip, he insisted that he was going to send it to us later. When we refused his kindness we thought that the matter was closed.

But weeks later, by messenger, we received an *agal* exactly like the one that Seleh Beg was wearing that day. He had asked someone who was going to Basrah to get it for him. Months later, with a little more twisting by a Paris milliner, it turned out to be a *hat*. In an effort to do something in return, we sent Seleh Beg a sketch we had made of him wearing the *agal*.

Sheikh Araby's house faced the canal. In the terrific heat and glare of the sun, with no trees to shade it, it looked hard and bare, a yellow, burned, brick building which seemed forbidding in its squareness.

There were black household slaves waiting for us at the entrance and they ushered us into a sort of hall which was

empty except for two large wooden benches where the guards probably slept at night. It was in this room that we later had lunch, but, with the addition of a table crowded with food, the room became much gayer and more inviting.

From there we were shown into another larger room that faced the canal. Here the walls were newly painted a bright yellow and the shape of the bricks was outlined on the walls in white. This was the room in which the Sheikh received and entertained foreign visitors. One had the feeling that he had decorated it and arranged it as it was, not because he liked the style himself but because he was trying to make his guests feel at home.

It had that cheerless look that many of these rooms seem to have when the so-called European and Arabic styles of furnishing are mixed. The Iraqis call the result of this union "European." But who the Europeans were, who were responsible in the first place for spreading this influence, one cannot imagine. There were six or seven davenports and a dozen chairs arranged evenly against the walls around the room. They were upholstered in tapestry, geometric and violent in pattern. The prevailing color was an almost-purple. There were many tables—beside every chair and in the center of the room. On these tables there was the most amazing collection of ash trays we had ever seen. They were apparently for decoration only; it would have been a shame to use them for ashes. One of them had an imitation watch in relief, painted gold, on the rim of the tray. Another held a gilded pipe which was made to look as if someone had just laid it down for a moment.

When the Sheikh arrived to greet us, we found him very arresting in appearance.

His eyes were peculiarly piercing and yet friendly. They were the sort of eyes that you imagine a Sheikh should have. His beard was pointed and black and his eyebrows were

bushy. He was pleasing to look at in his fine brown *abba* with his European jacket and long skirt-gown of gray.

He was reserved and quiet, sitting with the men on one side of the room and talking across to us on the other side. As he talked he fingered the string of yellow amber beads that he carried. These beads usually form a necessary part of an Iraqi's equipment; he tells them as if they were a rosary.

When we admired these particular amber beads, Sheikh Araby offered them to us, but we refused very definitely this time, and they were not sent on to us later.

We sat on contentedly, cooled by a good breeze from the canal. No one seemed to be in a hurry. No one jumped up to go and attend to anything. Lunch was not even mentioned. Plenty of time and a great deal of peace were in that room.

Sometimes the conversation stopped and no one said, "What nice weather it is!" or "Do you think it will rain?" to fill in the gap. In other parts of the world a meeting such as this, punctuated with gaps of five or ten minutes of silence, would result in social disgrace or an inferiority complex for somebody.

Had we not had so many questions we wanted to ask, we would not have broken these calm silences, but we wished to know how many wives the Sheikh had had.

But he did not know himself!

He thought perhaps thirty-eight.

And he could not remember how many children he had. Just then one of his favorite sons came into the room to be presented to us and to play with the two English boys. This son was about ten years old; he was dressed in European clothes with long trousers, and his manners were very good. He shook hands with us and said polite things to everyone. Then he and his friends went into a corner of the room and talked something over amongst themselves in a stream of Arabic.

At two o'clock we sauntered in to lunch. About a dozen of us sat down at the table, each with a bath towel as a napkin. We needed the bath towels, for we ate by hand. When we ignored the knives and forks that had been laid just for us, and dipped our fingers into the common bowls and platters of food, the black slaves in attendance laughed and pointed us out to each other.

They stood behind our chairs and filled up our glasses with a pink, syrupy lemonade called *sherbet*. It was a surprising accompaniment to the type of food that was served. The Iraqis are very fond of this sweet drink.

With his own hands, our host passed us very special bits of meat torn from the breasts of roast chickens. Rice and meat and vegetables were combined in dishes that were new to us. After we had eaten of the fifteen or twenty dishes set before us, we finished the meal with a jellied pudding that tasted of roses.

Then, with our bath towels under our arms, we followed the English boys to the end of the room where a slave stood waiting for us to wash our hands. He offered us a piece of soap and we were sure we could still see the word Palmolive on the bar. We washed under a stream of water that was poured from a large copper ewer into a basin held for us by a small black boy.

While we were occupied thus, the next group of lunchers sat down at the table. They had been watching from the sidelines while we had eaten. We understood that they were the relatives and friends of the household. After they had had their fill, another group took their places. Just who *they* were, we had no idea. Probably more relatives and friends. When the slaves and the harim had also had lunch (though not in this room), the remainder of the food was thrown to the dogs in the courtyard.

In the household of important sheikhs it is customary to

feed daily many others beside the members of the family, sometimes as many as a hundred.

We were reminded by contrast of a New York dinette and a dinner for four with a maid from Harlem in for the evening (or anyway until the dishes were washed).

After lunch we went to call on the harim.

It was located in a section by itself and was approached by crossing an open court where a few dusty trees and the remains of dried-up bushes made the day seem even warmer than it was. In the center of the harim building there was another court, completely bare, on to which the rooms of the harim opened.

We were shown into one of these rooms. It was so dark at first that we could see nothing at all; and when our eyes grew accustomed to the light, we were so dazzled by what we did see, that we could hardly speak.

It was a very surprising room, and very large; fifty by thirty feet perhaps.

Four enormous brass beds stood on platforms. Since it seems fitting enough to have beds in a harim, we did not know just why these beds were so astonishing. Perhaps it was the way they were mounted on elevations as if on display. High frames for mosquito nets reminded us of canopies. For privacy there were a few heavy drapes hanging from frames.

In these harim beds, all the springs had been removed; wide boards were laid across the frames to give the desired hard surface. Over the boards were blankets and a lot of fancy cushions. These were a sign of wealth; the more goose feathers they contained, the better. And the result was that they were stuffed so full, that instead of being soft and downy they were all as hard as rocks.

Beside each big bed there was a low, single couch, covered over with spreads of magenta, turquoise-blue, and bright yellow, all badly discolored and spotted.

It was easy to see where the bedding (that could sleep four hundred guests comfortably) was kept. On shelves reaching to the twenty-five-foot ceiling, stacks and rolls of it practically formed two sides of the room. A brilliantly-colored mural could hardly have been more effective.

We did not count the rolls to see if there were four hundred; we merely sighed and hoped that our own social position would never be such that four hundred guests would descend on *us* at one time.

The two remaining walls were also shelved. There on display was a dazzling assortment of hundreds of vases, jars, strange lamps, and glassware. In almost any small shop in Baghdad and Basrah, one may buy these trifles from Japan for a few *fil*s. On the lower shelves were toys such as miniature electric fans, kewpie dolls, and teddy bears that could jump on strings. (Just like a shooting booth at Coney Island, we thought, and just as hard to tear yourself away.)

Wall space that otherwise would have been empty was plastered with magazine advertisements and photographs, some examples of cigar store art, and a group of simple and attractive Persian paintings on glass.

And finally, around the entire ceiling, sparkled a row of glittering, oversized, Christmas tree balls in all the familiar colors!

The effect was startling. It was a master stroke in Glamor! In all our lives, we could never have thought of *that*.

Somehow, one would not have wanted this room different in the slightest detail.

Moha, one of Sheikh Araby's wives who was acting as hostess, was a handsome woman six feet tall and weighed about two hundred and fifty pounds. It is unusual for an Iraqi woman to be so tall and heavy, but, as she explained, it ran in her family. We had seen her father the day before at the *Serai* and he had impressed us with his height and build.

He had stood, a very imposing figure, a head above the rest of the crowd, commanding the respect due an important Sheikh.

Perhaps the room had been built on a scale to match Moha.

Moha had a contented and beaming face which made you feel her life was a happy one and that she was an exceptionally good-natured woman.

She wore a trailing dress which might have been a batik, but it was probably an imitation batik made in Japan. It dragged over the hard dirt floor and collected an all-over tone of dust at the bottom that made it pleasant to look at. Over this dress she wore the usual *abba* which slid off her head every few minutes so that she was obliged to adjust it constantly.

Moha showed us some of her fine *abbas* which she kept in the great chests. She was proud of her jewelry and she seemed surprised that we wore none to show her except the ordinary rings we had bought from the gypsies. She laughed over them and was very puzzled that we liked these stones set in silver. Did our men have no money to buy us good jewelry?

Sheikh Araby had only two wives at that time. Since the other wife was in Baghdad, we did not have the pleasure of meeting her. It was said that she was the favorite and that she was surprisingly independent for an Iraqi. She used her power over the Sheikh to get her own way about things, and she had money to spend. It was said that she often went into the *Establisement Orosdi-Back* (a kind of department store in Baghdad) and spent three or four hundred dollars in the same spirit in which we would buy a package of safety pins.

As we drank tea with Moha, the Sheikh appeared in the court. He joined us in the harim and we took the opportunity to make a sketch of him.

When it was finished the English boys passed it around the room.

Sheikh Araby looked at it critically. "The nose is not right at this point."

So we fixed the nose and offered him the sketch.

"What could I do with it?" he asked as he handed it back to us.

(Certainly there is no place for it in this room, we thought.)

We liked his frankness. We would like to have made a sketch of Moha, but she seemed shocked at the idea, so we did not press her. This Moslem custom of hiding the face behind a veil is even respected by the passport laws of Iraq. In the Iraq Directory we had seen the following regulation in regard to photographs:

Every passport or travel permit shall bear a photograph of the holder, unless the holder is a Moslem woman or other woman with similar social or religious prejudice or beliefs.

During our visit in the harim, black female slaves and children crowded at the doorway to hear and see what was going on inside. Out in the court there were groups of slaves sitting on the floor of the bare square. Dogs growled and gnawed at bones, the last remnant of lunch. Now as we prepared to leave the harim, all the slaves crowded around and seemed eager to be in the photographs which we had asked if we might take of the court.

We were obliged to hurry with the photographs since it was getting late, and we were reminded by Seleh Beg that we were to dine at his house that evening before going on to Brooksville.

As we went out to the car and said our good-bys, a great crowd gathered to see us off. We wondered where these men had come from, since the house was not in the town and certainly all these people had not been in the house. It was one of those things that is never explained in the East.

Sheikh Araby invited us to come back in three weeks' time for a week end of shooting. We would make a party of it with our English hosts and Douglas, he said.

But the week end did not materialize, for the rains set in before three weeks went by.

XXX

King Ghazi the First

THE FOLLOWING MORNING we started for Baghdad to keep our appointment with Jaafar Pasha.

We had no idea of the trouble that was brewing there, and we found later that no one else had either, except the few people in the plot.

It was in Kut, where we stopped at the supply store for a cold drink, that we got our first inkling of the disturbance.

The huge storekeeper came out to the car when we drove up, and asked us excitedly if we had heard about the "bombs" in Baghdad.

"Bombs!"

But he gave such a garbled report of "bombs," "air attacks," and "army march on Baghdad," that we did not try to find out more. The thing to do was to get to Baghdad as soon as possible. We saw Baghdad, in our imaginations, in smoking ruins, just as it must have looked when Hulagu the Tartar razed the town. So it had come to this! But as we went along we finally reassured each other. The storekeeper was probably exaggerating terribly.

We succeeded in avoiding many of the usual delays of the trip. But once when the driver stopped for water, we impatiently went into the little coffeehouse after him, only to find him bobbing up and down in prayer. We couldn't disturb him in that, of course.

As we drove along, the scattered bones that still lay along the roadside and in ragged, half-filled trenches seemed whiter than ever before. We had seen them many times and each time we thought about the misery of this unbelievable battlefield. The bones were those of Turkish soldiers. The British had collected their own dead over a period of years and had put them into cemeteries. But no matter whose bones these were, it was disconcerting sometimes to see a group of Arabs surreptitiously digging for whatever they might find, perhaps a metal button or some other trifle.

When we arrived in Baghdad, we saw that the streets were strangely empty. We went directly to the hotel, watching as we went for evidences of the bombs.

At the hotel we were met by the proprietor. He seemed surprised to see us. Why in the world had we come to Baghdad on this day? he asked. It was not until later that we heard that foreigners had been asked to stay out of the town itself until the disorder had died down.

A military *coup d'état* had come off that morning. It had been so carefully planned by four or five prominent members of an opposing political party, that the existing government was overthrown without more ado than a few bombs and notices dropped from planes.

The bombs had exploded here and there, causing injuries to one or two persons. The notices had demanded the resignation of the existing government and the surrender of the people. They had also threatened that if these steps were not taken immediately, more drastic measures would be used in persuasion.

It had been easy to commandeer the planes, since one of those who planned the coup was in high command in the Iraqi Air Force.

It took only a few hours for the cabinet to resign. Bekr Sidky Pasha took control. (The Army had been previously maneuvered to a point north of Baghdad, and marched toward the city.) Bekr Sidky became a virtual dictator of the country with the Chief of the Iraqi Air Force as his aide. A new cabinet was announced.

(We remembered the evening, after our drive up to Baghdad just before the wedding, when these two people had shown us the collection of fancy-bred chickens.)

But the name of Jaafar was whispered on every hand.

"What has happened to him?" we asked.

"Where is he?" people inquired. Something terrible had happened.

Later in the day someone said that at his own request Jaafar had gone that morning to deliver the King's letter to the advancing Army—the letter advising the Army of the resignation of the Government. But Jaafar's chauffeur, who had driven him on the errand, had returned to Baghdad without Jaafar. His mouth was shut. He was afraid to say anything.

Everyone was afraid to voice an opinion. Most of the former ministers had fled the country, without papers or property, people said. Their families were being sent out by secret planes to Egypt and Syria.

But people kept on asking what had happened to Jaafar.

In the afternoon we went up to the roof of the hotel, where we had slept our first Iraqi night. This time we were far from sleepy, for it was announced that there would be parades of the people in demonstration of their approval of the new government.

We were told not to go outside the hotel during the parade,

and certainly the prospect of being down on that street below was a terrifying one, for there, brandishing wicked-looking clubs and knives, marched young men, old men, and little boys. They pressed by in surging mobs, carrying great banners and flags.

Most of the paraders were in ragged dress. They sang wild, weird songs one moment, and the next they were on the point of fighting among themselves.

We thought of our isolation in Brooksville. All our neighbors there seemed tame enough. But what would happen if they were aroused? We remembered the time when Mohammed had gone completely crazy in anger against his wife's uncle, running around crazily, waving a long curved knife, shouting and yelling.

"I will kill him!" he had cried.

The morning after the *coup d'état*, we felt it was safe enough to go into the bazaars. Jaafar's name was on every tongue. People seemed to be sure that he was dead. But it was from London and Paris that evening over the radio that we heard it announced that Jaafar had been murdered while trying to deliver the letter to the advancing Army. He had been secretly buried in an unmarked grave somewhere between Baghdad and Baqubah.

In a few days things were quiet again, but no official word was offered concerning Jaafar's fate. His family went to Egypt.

The new government installed itself. But that was not the end of the matter, for it was less than a year later that the new Dictator and his Aide were shot and killed by a soldier. And another group came into power.

The body of Jaafar was brought to Baghdad, after almost a year in the desert, to be buried with fitting ceremony close

by the tomb where Feisal lies. There Jaafar rests, facing Mecca, while palm trees stand in dignified guard over these two men.

A few days after the *coup d'état* we visited the King.

Ghazi ibn Feisal is the only King we have talked to besides the King of the Fiji Islands and a King of Samoa, both of whose names we have forgotten. Each of these three Kings told us that his ambition was to visit America.

Since our conversations with Kings had been so few, we were excited at the prospect of talking to this fine-looking, modern young King of Iraq, who had made such a good impression on his subjects in Amarah. So we put on our best hats and gave the address *Billat el Malek* to our driver. He looked at us in surprise.

"*Billat el Malek?*" he repeated.

We saw that our stock had gone up some few points with him.

We knew that Ghazi had been born in the Holy City of Mecca, where the Sherifian family ruled. His grandfather was the old King Hussein of whom Lawrence speaks so often. His father, Feisal, undertook the primary education of his son, and then, following the custom of the Hashimite Sherifs, sent Ghazi out onto the desert to live with a Bedouin tribe. There he was educated in the desert tradition of freedom and hardship, and there it was that he became so fine a horseman that he later won many cups for jumping in England.

Ghazi spent two years at Harrow, and when he went back to the East it was to Baghdad instead of Mecca, for his father had been proclaimed King there in 1921. Ghazi entered the Royal Military College and when Feisal died in 1933, Ghazi was made King.

At the palace His Excellency Rustam Haidr Beg was expecting us. He was the Chief of the Royal Diwan and also Private Secretary to His Majesty the King. We were enter-

tained for a few moments in the large circular room that had been Feisal's reception room during the last years of his reign, and where he had seen dozens of people daily.

As we crossed the courtyard between this room and the new section in which King Ghazi was to see us, we were so busy talking to Rustam Haidr Beg that we failed to notice that there were guards lining the pathway. One of us ran into a bayonet.

"Careful!" said the Chief of the Royal Diwan.

It was such a ridiculous thing to have done, and so awkward, that we all laughed, and so did the King who was watching our approach through the glass door of his reception room.

It started us out in a gay mood.

Introductions were made.

"Being Americans, Your Majesty, we are terrified of royalty!"

"But I feel just the same about you!" the King answered.

So we began with the same handicap.

Rustam Haidr Beg then told us that it was very seldom that King Ghazi received women. We were reminded again that this was a man's world. The Secretary's statement seemed true, for the King was very shy at first. But gradually he became more at ease.

The young Emir Abdul'Ilā, cousin to the King and brother to the Queen, was with Ghazi when we came in; and now we all sat down in comfortable leather armchairs, around a low table to drink coffee.

The room was done in excellent taste. It was really striking because in it there was an entire absence of what is generally considered elegant by Iraqis. We could not help speaking of it, and we were told that it was done by an English decorator.

We also found out that morning that conversations with Kings are not always what one expects. They are likely to

turn out like a conversation over a long distance telephone. We had wanted, of course, to talk about important things that were happening in the country just then, but instead, it seemed to be the trivial things that made up the interview. (We had been advised that Ghazi preferred not to mention the recent political happenings.)

"Do you really spend two hours a day dressed in overalls working in your garage?" we asked as a starter.

"Oh, yes," said the King, getting enthusiastic when this subject was mentioned. (He spoke in English, a little hesitatingly but well.) "Three motor cycles, six cars, a plane, and several motorboats can take up a lot of time."

(If we were kings, we thought, we would never even *look* at such an uninteresting thing as a spark plug!)

"Have you seen my phosphorescent Mercedes?" asked the King.

Well, this is getting something like, we thought.

"It must have been terribly expensive!" said we. (Imagine talking prices to a King!)

"Yes, it was very dear. It cost about five hundred pounds for the paint job alone, but it shines at night!"

We imagined a spot of glowing light moving mysteriously along the road.

"It must frighten the Bedouins when you race across the countryside in the darkness!"

"I should think so!" said Ghazi, smiling.

What an Arabian Nights' Tale this would make, we thought, if this were Harun-al-Rashid's Baghdad, instead of the new Dictator's!

We asked about some of the King's other cars.

"The prettiest car I have is the White Fiat," said Ghazi. "Mussolini sent it to me."

We wouldn't have minded that ourselves, we thought. But



after one trip from Ali Gharbi to Baghdad, Mr. Mussolini would certainly disown all connection with the Fiat.

Everyone in the country knows that Ghazi is enthusiastic about flying. But we wanted to ask him firsthand. He said that he liked to fly only when he did the piloting himself.

About this time we felt the futility of all small talk. We were never very much good at it, anyway.

We spoke of the Crown Prince, Ghazi's baby son. (Ghazi is married to his cousin, the Princess Aliah, who is the daughter of Ali, Feisal's brother, and ex-King of the Hedjaz.)

Ghazi laughed when he described the child.

"He is very naughty!"

"Naughty?"

"He takes all his toys apart immediately to see what is inside of them!"

"Just like his father, Your Majesty!"

Because Ghazi seemed so young we felt very sympathetic with him. (He was twenty-four.) His father had been so fine and so famous a man that it would be difficult to emulate him. A King's job would be hard enough without that.

We asked if His Majesty had liked England while there in school? Did his travels in Europe amuse him? Had he a desire to travel farther?

The answer to all of these questions was "Yes."

"You must come then, Your Majesty, to visit our marvelous America!"

Rustam Haidr Beg told us that he had been planning just such a trip for Ghazi.

"Yes," said the King, "if we have peace here, I will come next year."

"If we should be in New York then, would you permit us to give a cocktail party for you, Your Majesty?"

"Thank you, I will be delighted, but no cocktails for me, please."

We had forgotten for the moment that orange juice would have to be the order of the day, for the King's religion forbids him to drink stronger things.

Ghazi thanked us for the sketches that we had given him in Amarah. He had been surprised, he said, to see in that remote part of his kingdom two Americans who made sketches of him.

Would he autograph the other sketches we had done? we asked. (We are not autograph collectors.) So Ghazi led us over to his very impressive desk and wrote down the nice Arabic characters that appear on this sketch of him.

When we left Ghazi we were about to cross the little garden

court that led back again to Feisal's round room. We complimented him on the beauty of his garden. "And how peaceful!"

"We hope," said His Majesty King Ghazi the First, "that our country will be the same!"

XXXI

Arab Recipes

“EVERYBODY KNOWS how to make these things,” our broker host of Amarah had explained two weeks ago when we had asked him for the recipe of the pickled eggplant.

But everybody did not include Yusef our cook.

As soon as we had returned from Baghdad to Brooksville, we remembered our resolve to have more Arab food at our own table.

But Yusef did not believe that we would really prefer a native dish to roast beef, for instance. All this time we had never been able to coax him to prepare for us the dishes of the country, except for the smoked fish and Indian curry.

Since this was the case, we concluded that it would be necessary to use a little subtlety to get what we wanted. We knew the hour when Yusef prepared food for himself. At the same time he prepared food for the other servants as well—in one large saucepan. So at this hour we would walk out to the kitchen as if to give a forgotten instruction.

Sometimes, there on the floor, we would find Yusef, Mohammed, Motlog, and Nasir, all eating from a common dish. They would be embarrassed to be found like this, and so we



would leave the kitchen by the back door as if we were just passing through.

But sometimes when we came, Yusef would be alone. A dish would be cooking on the stove and smelling very good.

Yusef would look guilty. He was really supposed to do his own cooking in his own house. He would stand in front of the stove to hide his preparations.

We would sniff and ask, "What is this?"

"Nothing, Memsahib," the cook would answer.

"But it must be something. What have you on the stove? Is it for the cats?"

"Oh, no, Memsahib, it is nothing. It is something I cook for Nuri's father. He sick, very sick."

"May we taste it, please?"

He would look relieved, and he would hurry to get a spoon and put a little sample in a saucer, so that we could taste it. The stew or whatever it happened to be was always excellent.

"Will you please prepare this same dish for us tomorrow? Make it *exactly* like this."

He would promise faithfully.

But tomorrow there would be a mutton roast that would spoil if we did not use it at once.

So the new dish would have to wait until the following day. After that, when we would finally have it for lunch, it would not taste at all like the sample we had tried in the kitchen. Or perhaps we had forgotten by that time just what the sample was like. In any case, whatever the dish, it would lack seasoning.

If we questioned Yusef, he would explain:

"Memsahib, I thought you no like it so hot."

One day when Yusef went to Amarah on errands for us, we asked Mohammed to prepare an Iraqi dinner.

The result was that he prepared and served us with three different kinds of curry. We were surprised because he was almost always anxious to please.

"But, Mohammed, don't you know how to prepare the dishes of your own country?"

"My sister, she always do the cooking in my house in Baghdad."

"But you cook here for yourself when you are alone. What do you do with the meat we buy for you each day from the bazaar?"

"Nothing, Memsahib, it is nothing, the dish I make for me. You would not like it, Memsahib. It would be too sour. There is only the dish made with mutton chops, but it would not please you; it would be too sweet."

"Will you *please* prepare it for tomorrow?"

"But we have no dried plums, Memsahib."

So we sent him off to Ali Gharbi to buy the dried plums and apricots and almonds and dried pomegranate seeds.

The next day we feasted on a dish that was worthy of the finest *bistro* in Paris. It became, during the next few months,

the speciality of our house. The sauce combined the sweetness of the prunes with the tartness of the dried pomegranate seeds. And in addition, the special flavor of lamb and the rich taste of the walnuts went toward making a sauce to be remembered.

This was the recipe:

- 12 lamb chops
- 2 tablespoons drippings or butter
- 1 cup water
- 1 cup dried apricots
- 1 cup prunes
- 1 cup walnut meats in halves
- $\frac{1}{4}$ cup homas beans (navy beans may be substituted)
- 1 cup raisins
- 1 heaping tablespoon curry powder

Dried seeds of pomegranates (use instead slices of one half of a lime or lemon)

Soak the prunes, raisins and beans separately for several hours. Then brown the lamb chops in the butter and let stew for about fifteen minutes. Add more butter if necessary. Then add the salt, apricots, prunes, walnuts, raisins, and beans. Let this simmer over a low fire for about two hours or more. During the last hour, add the curry powder and the pomegranate seeds.

We suspect that this recipe is variable. Once we saw it done in a casserole in the oven. We have seen the cook add *dhibbis*, a syrup made from dates. To counteract the extra sweetness, he probably increased his amount of pomegranate seeds.

Rice is usually served as an accompaniment.

After we had so thoroughly accepted this dish, we had no more trouble getting both Mohammed and Yusef to show off many more of their native dishes. Even the Second Boy-of-the-moment prepared for us a new dish one day. He used liver as a base. It made a delicious casserole for buffet lunches.

We served it one day at lunch when there were two English guests. One of the guests (who warmed our hearts by taking three helpings of liver) asked about it. Was it an American speciality? When we told him that it was an Iraqi dish, he was very surprised. He had lived in Iraq for fifteen years and he had never tasted Iraqi food!

It is prepared like this:

Slice enough liver and heart for six people. Fry in fat or drippings until crisp. In another pan fry in fat three sliced onions. To this add four diced tomatoes and fry with the onions until brown. Then add the liver and heart, and salt and pepper to taste. Now you will probably not take the trouble to dry and powder the pomegranate seeds, but you may use two limes that are pretty well dried out. Slice the limes and drop them into the mixture, seeds and all. You may be obliged to use three limes, since the charm of the dish lies in its sour taste.

Add a heaping tablespoon of curry powder—or enough to give a definite curry flavor. Cover this mixture with water and let it cook slowly for several hours. The curry powder we used was very strong, so it will not do any good to tell you how much our own cook used. As a matter of fact, he could never tell us either. He varied all the ingredients each time he made it. If we watched him the dish never turned out as well as when he was left to himself. So we have tried to strike an average when it comes to giving definite measurements, and we hope that if this dish is tried out, it will not turn out to be chop suey.

It was some time before this that we had discovered that as a summer drink pomegranate juice was very satisfactory. We had first thought of using it on a thirsty day when we were served fresh pomegranate seeds as a sweet. These seeds are very awkward to eat. We had sent the seeds back to Yusef

and asked him to drain off the juice and ice it. Served that way it was most successful with its tart-sweet taste, and its lovely red color shone beautifully in champagne glasses.

We always kept a pitcher of this juice in the icebox so that it could be served cold for breakfast and before dinner. We found that as a long drink with soda water it was very refreshing. Undoubtedly pomegranate juice is drunk in other parts of the world, but we had never run across it before.

The only thing wrong with pomegranate juice is that it sounds so much like permanganate.

It is about the same color, too.

We used a solution of permanganate in which to wash fresh fruit and vegetables at the table.

After the first time that the staff had confused pomegranate with permanganate, the tangle never became untangled. And there were even times when we ourselves hesitated before ordering one or the other.

In Iraq permanganate is an essential household supply. In the kitchen we used it in a sincere and desperate attempt at cleanliness. Since Yusef always looked hopelessly dirty, we had made a rule that whenever he came into the kitchen from outside, he was to wash his hands in a basin of permanganate solution. *

Sometimes in our sadder moments we were of the opinion that this beautiful permanganate in a basin on the kitchen table was only a decorative gesture. All this time we had had no idea that it was making such a deep impression on Mohammed; and that after all our efforts, we were to be rewarded with at least a momentary success in cleanliness.

It happened after Yusef was no longer with us and when, during an interval between cooks, Mohammed took charge of the kitchen. We knew by this time that he had a streak of cleanliness in his nature that attacked him violently at the most unexpected moments. And now at this time of his

kitchen service, one of these attacks was upon him. The kitchen became a new field to conquer. And besides that, he had hated Yusef anyway, and had always predicted that it was only a matter of time before our whole family would be poisoned as a result of Yusef's deplorable kitchen technique.

So now he took great pleasure in astonishing us with shining pots and pans and the extraordinary clean state of the table tops and the shelves.

After a few days we noticed that the dust was beginning to accumulate in the rest of the house and that the beds remained unmade until a later and later hour each day. We suggested to Mohammed that we would help him in the kitchen until the new cook arrived from Baghdad. He thanked us and said that he would take care of Mr. Brooks Sahib and the Memsahibs and Mr. Faivre Sahib, himself—he did not need help; he could do all the work *alone*.

"Don't you worry, Memsahib," he said.

A few days later we announced that we would do the cooking ourselves; that after all it was too much to expect of Mohammed.

This time his face grew dark. He had come to own our kitchen. He was as jealous of it as a mother of her pet child.

But the house itself was neglected. The other servants did not take any interest without a little pushing from Mohammed.

The following noon we made up our minds to bake a chocolate cake at least.

We went into the kitchen and asked for sugar and tinned lard and a mixing bowl. Mohammed could see that this time we were firm. We had expected trouble, but he appeared pleasant enough.

He brought a clean, damp towel, wiped the table lovingly, flicked a speck of dust (which could not *possibly* have been

there) from the shelf above, and then reached for a Flit gun and sprayed the entire kitchen.

He is trying to discourage us, we thought.

Then he unlocked the storeroom, brought out the ingredients for the cake, and placed the yellow bowl beside them.

When all this was done, he stood before the table as if to guard the things that were on it.

"Memsahib," he asked with a smile, "have you washed your hands?"

"Why, no, Mohammed. Why?"

Mohammed quickly reached up to a shelf and lifted down a basin filled with permanganate solution.

"Memsahib, before you mix cake, please will you wash your hands in this pomegranate water?"

XXXII

Water Buffalo and Other Things

THE WATER BUFFALO
went on strike early in the fall.

We had settled down to what we thought was to be a calm season, but we had not reckoned with the water buffalo.

The herd belonged to Rashid. Rashid lived in the village near the Plant and worked on the sand washer. He also sold buffalo milk. He was one of the ambitious Arabs. Of course Rashid's wife took care of the buffalo. So all Rashid had to do was to deliver the milk and cash the monthly chit for the six beer-bottles of milk that we took daily. This was pleasant work.

But one day the milk was not delivered.

When we inquired we found that Rashid was holding out for a higher price. Instead of the customary eight *fi*ls a bottle, he now demanded ten. The buffalo were tired, he said. One of them was drying up. And besides that, the Arabs were all crazy about his buffalo milk and they weren't fussy about whether he took the cream off for himself or not.

So that was it. We asked Douglas for his opinion; he generally knew how to handle these people. He said that if we

gave in too easily, in another month the price of milk would be doubled.

"Why don't we buy a couple of buffalo ourselves for our own use?" Douglas asked. "Think it over anyway."

But when we thought it over we remembered Douglas's story of his own family's experiences at their country home in England; how, through one thing and another, one full-blooded prize cow, bought in order to supply the family milk, had complicated life through a period of years; how gradually she had grown into a herd of cattle, a staff of stable help, an array of modern stables, and the time-taking business of exhibiting at county fairs.

We decided to pay Rashid the ten *filis*, since we could not see our future lives trampled over by water buffalo. We sent Rashid a note agreeing to the increase, but telling him that we would require him to bring the buffalo to our back gate and milk them on our premises. In that way we thought there was a chance of getting cream instead of skim milk in our morning coffee.

Word came back in alarm from Rashid that the buffalo were much too fierce to come to our gate, and if one came they would *all* have to come, since one could not be moved without the others. They would certainly charge a stranger; they hated the smell of European women! It would be impossible.

But nevertheless at the end of a week's time Rashid and his wife and his brother appeared with the herd. There, romping around, were Mother and Father Buffalo with a few Cousins and one Offspring, whose strange baby face, with whiskers all over it, was fiercer than any of the others.

Rashid shouted and motioned for us to stand back. He poked at the big beasts with a club to get them in position. Rashid's brother tickled the Mother Buffalo on the forehead while Rashid's wife coaxed the Baby to drink a little milk

from his Mother to quiet her and start the milk flowing. Just when he had started to enjoy himself the Baby was pushed violently away and held with all the force that Rashid and his brother possessed, while Rashid's wife proceeded to milk the Mother. When the Baby was quiet, Rashid's brother started the soothing tickling again so that the milking would go on without some sudden disturbance of temperament on the Mother's part.

The milk, together with dust and a few buffalo hairs, fell into an ancient cooking pan. When the pan was filled Rashid's wife squatted on the ground, took one of the six empty beer-bottles, held it over the pan and dipped the warm milk up with an old soup tin. As she filled the bottles the milk streamed down over her dirty hand with which she held the neck of the bottle, and fell back into the pan only to be dipped up again. In this way the bottles were slowly filled and the hands of Rashid's wife were thoroughly washed in our milk.

During the next few weeks we were very uninterested in milk—and boiled milk had never appealed to us.

However, now that we had witnessed a milking, we agreed that ten *fls* a bottle was not too much to ask.

The problem merely needed a little thought to satisfy everyone concerned. We compromised. Rashid was not to bring his buffalo to our gate each day; we were to send our own boy to superintend the milking personally in the enclosed, muddy yard where the animals were quartered. (Sometimes when it was cold they slept inside the mud hut with the family.) Our boy was to take a clean pan (rinsed with boiling water, we hoped) from our kitchen. He was to see that the milking was done directly into this pan which was marked with black paint to indicate how far six bottles of milk would go.

We never wanted to see the water buffalo in action again.

During the time of the milk strike we were getting ready for the winter.

In the studio we were supervising the building of a new chimney. The old chimney had never been a success. The first thing it had done was to set fire to the building. This had happened the winter before, soon after the studio was finished. We had been sitting together reading in the smoke for several hours without knowing that the building was actually on fire. (The room was always filled with smoke anyway.) We had been grumbling because no sooner were we warmed up than we were choked with the smoke, and we were obliged to open the doors and windows. Even the cats could hardly stand it, and the Gazelle's eyes were watery.

Then suddenly we had seen a flame leap from the reed matting on the ceiling.

It took hours to put the fire out. Everyone at the house and the office helped to carry petrol tins filled with water from the kitchen tap. Even old soup tins were put to use.

We discovered later that the mason had merely left a piece of reed matting in the flue when he laid mats down as part of the roof.

After the fire it had taken some days to repair the studio. And the fireplace still smoked.

Now this fall we tore down the whole chimney and then designed one ourselves—which in the end did not turn out successfully either. We built the flue in a zigzag style, which left unforeseen steps of bricks all the way up the inside of the chimney. At the top on the roof, the mason gave way to repressed creative impulse. He built a very fancy cap to the chimney. It was quite beautiful to see. There were small arched openings, well-proportioned, where the smoke escaped.

The mason was very proud of his work.

It did not take the cats and all the baby cats long to discover what a fine chimney it was. They raced up and down

the steps inside the flue and spent most of their time sitting up in the nice little arches and looking down at the garden. From there they could call down to us and anyone else that passed.

Each time we wanted to build a fire, we had to count the cats to be sure that none of them was on his way up or down the chimney. If they were sitting in the arches nothing in the world would tempt them to come down, and we would be obliged to wait for them before we could build a fire for ourselves.

It was really too much of a problem to start making more changes. We checked it off our list of Things To Do, and adjusted ourselves to the situation.

The cats were very happy.

When we dropped the chimney problem, we concentrated on the installation of a hot-water heater, which had been lying in the storeroom since we had arrived.

Faucets and gadgets and pipes, in fact all things mechanical, have always remained a complete mystery to us. But after many delays and conferences and explanations from the various fitters who attempted this job, one thing remained clear in our minds: the heater must have an exhaust pipe for steam to escape. Since it did not come equipped with such a pipe, it was necessary to have one made, attach it correctly, cut a hole in the roof, and be sure that the pipe through the roof was the proper height.

After some weeks of feminine struggling with all these mechanical details, the heater was still not successfully installed. The trouble was that we could not command sustained action from the fitters. And then finally Douglas took pity on us and with a few magic words, got the apparatus set up, installed, and producing four baths regularly each evening at seven o'clock sharp.

Every time we bathed in a bathtubful of brown Tigris

water, we congratulated ourselves. The whole thing had been accomplished without even a minor explosion.

And then in the bathroom one day we heard a gentle sort of pounding from above. We idly wondered what it was—perhaps it had come from the kitchen, where someone was breaking up sugar. We thought no more about it.

The next day we heard it again.

Still we did not think seriously about it. It might, we thought, be 'Brahim pounding sticks in the ground to lay out new vegetable patches or to repair a fence. We continued to enjoy our hot baths in the evening. It was very good to see a roaring charcoal fire in the heater and feel the warmth of it steal through the rooms.

But a few days later when we made the rounds of the roof to see what was going on, we happened to stand near the exhaust pipe. There was a large wooden cork in the open end, driven deep down in the pipe!

We called Mohammed and asked him who had done it.

Although in the most astonishing way Mohammed usually knew everything that was going on in the entire community of Brooksville, this time he had no idea who had pounded the whittled cork into our precious exhaust pipe. But we soon found the guilty one.

The Latrine Boy saw us up on the roof. Like a hunted animal protecting its young, he came up to save such a good job on a pipe from being tampered with. Mohammed jumped on him.

He told us then that a few weeks before he had seen water coming out of this strange pipe. The water collected in a little pool on the roof. The obvious thing to do was to plug up the pipe and so stop the water from leaking through the roof into the house.

Douglas said later that such interest in our welfare and such initiative should not go unrewarded. We thought it over but

after dreaming for several nights of terrific explosions, and the house lying in ruins, we decided that we could not agree with him.

But it was too bad, we thought, that the Latrine Boy was only a latrine boy and that he could never become anything else on the ladder of success, for his standing on the lowest rung was not subject to change. Otherwise such qualities as he had might have taken him far.

It was during this time while we were busy preparing for the winter that we began to have trouble with the Cook Situation.

We had discovered that the list of household staff was by no means permanent. We were obliged frequently to change second boys and sweepers, not to speak of the outside help, such as assistant gardeners. Mohammed seemed to have something to do with this constant shifting, since he grew more temperamental every day.

And now it was Yusef that we had to let go. His spells of drunkenness grew too inconvenient.

We had several cooks after Yusef and in between these there were cookless intervals. It seemed difficult in such a remote spot to lure a cook from Baghdad or Basrah. And then came the Aviator-Capped-One.

His cooking was fair and he was decorative. While he was on duty he wore a fur aviator's cap, a relic from the War. We never saw him without it. Two dirty strings hung from the sides of this cap and fell into whatever he happened to be cooking. He had a very fine twinkle in his eye and his mustache made a big splotch on his dark Indian face.

But he did not last long.

We did not mention to him the strings of his cap (the flavor of which we imagined we could taste in everything he prepared for us), but we did mention the kitchen floor which he left filthy each night after dinner. He refused point-blank



to wash up his floor (a cook's duty in Iraq) and he declared that he did not like the place anyway! He said that he could not make a profit off the marketing here in Brooksville, since we had a shopper who did that.

Somehow we did not want to let him go. A cook who had the courage to wear an old aviator's cap as decoration must have a few virtues that had not come to light. But he was set on going, and when we told him that he could leave the following day, he thanked us with genuine pleasure.

When he was ready to leave he came to the studio to receive the chit for his wages. He was dressed for his travel to Baghdad. His cap was tied under the chin and he wore a coat which was also a relic of a better day. There were holes, very large holes, here and there in the cloth, and the frayed effect of the upper pockets suggested that a mouse may have lived there happily for years.

While he talked to us, giving us his version of what was due him as wages, we noticed a shiny bit of hardware hanging from the tangle of the pocket.

When we first came to Brooksville we had had a small stock of three or four American tin openers, the easy type. These had been brought all the way from New York as a convenience for opening tins of cat food en route. And then, after our arrival, they had become very precious, for we found that we could not duplicate them in Iraq. But they had gradually disappeared until now there was only one left in the kitchen. Or at least we hoped there was still one left in the kitchen.

Our staff had found these openers fascinating and on several occasions we had even been asked if we would present one to a departing servant who thought that such a superior tin opener would surely get him another job.

And now as we talked to the Aviator-Capped-One, we were not able to restrain our curiosity about the shiny object peeping out of his pocket.

"What *is* that thing in your pocket, Cook?"

"Memsahib, what thing?"

He felt around in the cloth. It took him several minutes to untangle the tin opener from the frayed pocket.

He held it up in his fingers and he began to laugh good-naturedly. It was difficult for him to stop laughing.

"You will think, Memsahib, that I *stole* it!"

He said that he had laid his coat on the kitchen table; that when he had picked up the coat, the coat must have picked up the tin opener, which must have been on the table too.

It was so simple that we found ourselves laughing with him.

We were more than ever sorry that such a good man had to go from us.

XXXIII

New Year

EVERY TIME WE LOOKED out of the window we saw a Christmas card passing by.

And we did not have to go to Macy's and order them a month ahead.

Camels with trappings and tassels, Wise Men with all the correct drapery, and Mary (by some other name and less immaculate) journeying with Joseph. Contrary to popular legend, Joseph usually rode the donkey and Mary walked.

This Christmas we ignored the civilized custom of sending cards until we received one from a famous Iraqi General. His card was fancy and sentimental. The text was in Arabic and, according to Simon, the thought was on the order of our American cards where "cheer" always rhymes with "year" and the last line ends in "you" (probably to rhyme with "true").

And so we sat down and drew a greeting card to send to the General. It turned out to be a nice serious sketch of ourselves riding camels. We were proud of it, for it looked well.

We sent it to the General.

A week later we had a letter from His Excellency. He thanked us and said that it had been very kind of us to have

sent the card; he realized that we were not in a city where we could go out and buy a card; and considering this he thought it very nice of us to send this substitute.

Around this time we turned our thoughts to cooking.

With the loss of the Aviator-Capped-One, we were without a cook. But two guests, whom we were expecting from Baghdad to spend the holidays with us, had promised to bring a cook with them or, better still, to send one along to Brooksville ahead of them.

Two days before Christmas it rained and the roads became impassable. We knew now that these guests would never be able to arrive for Christmas Day. So we invited two local guests for an American Christmas dinner. One was the Scottish engineer of the River Transport Company who rented a house from us and the other was an Italian engineer who worked for Douglas on the new road project.

Christmas morning had barely dawned before we realized that the local *jinn*s were hovering pretty close—evil-intentioned *jinn*s.

First it was Mohammed. His personal problems were bothering him again. And now he became especially temperamental. He looked dark and gloomy. He lost his judgment. He wanted to make others as unhappy as himself. He started the morning by deliberately throwing out all the carefully filtered water that we had saved for drinking and cooking purposes.

And then at the most inconvenient moment of the morning, three local Ali Gharbians (the Judge, the Doctor and the School Teacher) came to bring their Mohammedan greetings to our Christian household on this, our Holiday. They were doing their best to make us feel at home in this still-strange land of theirs and we realized that the gesture meant goodwill.



Since it was customary to serve coffee at that hour of the morning, we said, "Coffee, please," to Mohammed, though we knew perfectly well that there was not a drop of water in the house with which to prepare the coffee for the guests. In the excitement Mohammed triumphantly carried in to the visitors a great Christmas cake just arrived from England. It was Fortnum and Mason's best and we had waited a month for its arrival. It was to have been the finishing touch to our evening dinner.

To be polite, the three guests took great helpings of cake. And though we could see that the strange taste of it was unpleasant to them, they ate more and more of it to please us. Finally, urged on by Mohammed, they would have finished it off, had we not offered them some biscuits as an alternative.

As to the rest of the staff, the Second Boy did not appear at all that day. Mohammed had very nearly killed him in a fight at the café the night before. The Sweeper alone remained, faithful and eager to do all he could to help us.

The *jinn*s hovered closer as the day advanced.

Mohammed became rude. We were obliged to order him to go. We could get on better without him, we thought. He went without a word.

The kitchen was a much pleasanter place after he had gone. We did the cooking ourselves on the two-burner kerosene stove and a "primus." We cooked each vegetable in turn throughout the day and then left it to be warmed up just before the dinner was to be served.

When the guests arrived at eight we were still in the kitchen. Fortunately a few minutes later a repentant and helpful Mohammed appeared at the kitchen door. Without a word he came in, assumed complete control, and served the meal as if nothing at all had happened.

Peace on earth had hardly been the watchword in our house that Christmas Day.

The day after Christmas brought us a new cook. He had been sent down by our delayed guests from Baghdad. The guests themselves arrived later the same afternoon.

The *jinn*s were still busy. Things happened in rapid succession. The Washlady, Kowkub, stole our only turnips; the Latrine Boy ran off and neglected his job for five hours, for which he had to be fined; the new cook claimed wages for the seven days that it took him to travel from Baghdad to Brooksville (he had gone West instead of East); and on top of all this, all the precious sacks of charcoal that we used for the fires disappeared suddenly as if by magic.

All these little things had to be dealt with as if we were

the head of a community, sitting in judgment (which was pretty shaky at times).

For instance, the case of the Washlady and the turnips was handled like this:

We discovered Kowkub in this petty thievery when we had gone out to solve the whereabouts of the Latrine Boy. (We had been obliged to go in search of him ourselves, since the cook, who was the only one around, was not expected to be on speaking relations with the Latrine Department.) There in the garden we saw Kowkub carefully washing a great many turnips in a petrol tin. As fast as she washed them, she transferred them into a sack that lay almost filled beside her.

Now as far as the turnips were concerned, in themselves they were just an ordinary vegetable, but to us at that moment they were very precious. We had put in only a very small bed of them in the fall, and the variety that they furnished to our menu was welcome. We had been saving them for these holidays.

When Kowkub caught sight of us as she washed the turnips, she looked very guilty.

"*Shinu hadha?*" (What is this?) we asked her, and we pointed to the sack.

She told us that 'Brahim had given her the turnips.

But when 'Brahim came to be questioned, he denied this but said that the turnips were no good anyway.

We consulted the new cook. He said that the turnips were very good.

So we deducted the five *fil*s from Kowkub's pay chit that we had just given her that morning. We simply changed the amount from one thousand *fil*s to nine hundred and ninety-five.

Then we explained to her carefully:

"Kowkub, we are charging you five *fil*s for stealing the turnips. Tomorrow, if you ask us for all the vegetables in our

garden, we will be very glad to give them to you and your entire family."

The answer to all this should have been that the lady learned her lesson, that she thanked us for tomorrow's vegetables, and that she continued to wash on happily forever.

But what *really* happened was that the lady turned on her heel, walked off, said that she did not want the old turnips anyway, and what was more, she would not come back tomorrow!

Somehow it was very upsetting, and it was hard to concentrate on anything else for the rest of the day. The uncomfortable thought of Kowkub continued to buzz around like a fly you cannot catch.

"She will come back, all right!" we assured each other at intervals.

But we remembered how long it had taken us to find anyone else to take Kowkub's place when she had been sick the summer before.

And then we began to remind ourselves that we must be charitable; that after all Kowkub was really poor; and then there was that little boy of hers. Maybe it would be a good thing to offer her a small raise in her monthly wage. . . .

For three days Kowkub did not go to Simon to cash her chit of nine hundred and ninety-five *fil*s. But on the fourth day she came to us.

She handed us a five-*fil*s piece and her chit.

Then she asked us if we would please make out a new chit for a thousand *fil*s. She said that everyone would know that she had been fined for stealing if she cashed the nine hundred and ninety-five.

By that time we were ready to do practically *anything* for Kowkub. We made out a new chit, told her of her small raise in pay, and loaded her down with vegetables. Everyone was satisfied. . . .

On the first day of the New Year, we decided that if this was a sample of what the New Year was to be, then there would be many bad moments in store for us.

Our guests had gone and Douglas had gone with them. Though he did not want to leave Brooksville during this holiday season, he was obliged to spend two weeks in Egypt. One of us was in bed with a fever. The Gazelle was sick, too. Girl-cat did not seem to be well for she was unusually tired and sleepy and would touch nothing to eat. The house was cold and empty and unsympathetic. We concentrated on the smallest room where a kerosene stove stood, flickering and giving off very little heat.

Hugging the stove, the Gazelle shivered with a chill. He threw up the barley he had eaten that morning, so we gave him a little brandy and wrapped him up in Douglas's blue wool bathing suit.

There were many things to be done. The new lambs which had been presented to us were waiting to be fed from their baby bottle. The cats cried for their breakfast. The food had to be checked in from the market, and cases of supplies from Baghdad had to be opened up. The menus for the next day were to be decided on.

Then there were the vegetables from the garden to send to the engineers, the clerks, and the storekeeper. Eight baskets of beets, onions, cabbage, lettuce, spinach, and radishes had to be sorted out for these people. Though 'Brahim usually took care of all this, he bothered us with details on this day.

By noon things had brightened up a bit. All the invalids revived slightly. We made a tour of the house. As we passed through the kitchen the Second Boy spit on the red tiles of the kitchen floor. He could never remember that this was not supposed to be done. One of us stepped up to him, ripped a piece out of his new headdress and told him to clean up the

floor with that. He was so surprised that he quickly did as he was told.

Then we were interrupted in our rounds by a strong smell coming from the dining room. It proved to be a forgotten partridge, shot many days ago and still hanging from a rafter.

We called Mohammed and asked him to remove the bird. He became rude again. This was the last straw. Mohammed had gone from bad to worse.

We told him that he should leave at once.

We would get him a place in Baghdad where he would have a change, since that was evidently what he needed. He would be happier there, and we would have peace.

Just after lunch when he came to the studio for his chit he stood about evidently waiting for something.

"Memsahib, please will you give me my recommendation now?"

"What recommendation, Mohammed?"

"Memsahib, all butlers get recommendation."

"No, Mohammed, we are sorry that we cannot give you a recommendation. You were a very good boy the first six months, but since then you have been very disappointing. You have not done a good job."

Mohammed stood silent for a moment. Then he asked:

"Memsahib, will you give me a recommendation for the first six months?"

It was fortunate that the sun came out in the afternoon. When we went out into its warmth we found that the ducks and geese were loose and were eating up all the newly transplanted lettuce. It was 'Brahim who was angry this time; *we* thought that the white geese and the dark ducks looked too well against the wet ground and the young green lettuce to be shut up in their own yard.

Behind them the mountains were blue and purple. And there was a patch of yellow over near the Plant. It was the

fleet of great yellow tractors, newly arrived from America and ready to work on the roads.

After Mohammed had gone, tranquillity descended on the house.

But it did not last long. The following day two cats became ill. They died the next morning.

In order to avoid infection (in case infection was possible) we separated the remaining cats by putting one in each room in the house.

Two days later, three more died.

We lived in a kind of nightmare for the next six days. We had wired to a doctor in Baghdad for medicine, but since the roads were cut again we did not receive it until after the eighth cat had died. Boycat did not even resist. He suffered so much in the end that we gave him a sedative to make him sleep. Piggy Tail (one of the first litter) and a baby cat were the last ones to go. We had kept these two separated, but when we saw that they had both developed the symptoms, we put them together. The lonely baby seemed happy and lay very close to Piggy Tail who mothered it until it died.

We buried them all in the side garden under the palm tree where Boycat and Girlcat had liked to play when they first came to Brooksville.

Only Girlcat survived.

We remembered that she had eaten nothing on New Year's Day when the rest of them had been so hungry. We also remembered Mohammed's ugly mood of that day. Stories of what a ground-up amber bead could do ran through our heads.

But surely, we thought, no one could be so cruel.

After a few days the Gazelle took sick and died one night alone in his cage. And then the lambs died, too.

The following week we received a cable calling us back to America.

It would be a very good thing, we decided, to go away for some months at this time.

We had made a start in our Pioneering Project. In a few months we would come back to our desert and start again, but not to collect *Frigidaires* and to conquer Baghdad boils.

This time we would go back to live in "houses of hair," the black goat's-hair tents of the Bedouins. Douglas had become allied in business with a powerful Sheikh—the same Sheikh who had gallantly said his noon-day prayer, even though to do it he had to interrupt a conference and retire to a corner of the office. We would camp in our black tents in the North under the protection of his tribe.

This time there would be no more zinnias to plant in our isolation.

But surely we would gain a better understanding of our future Mohammeds and Kowkubs. . . .

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